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JOHN MILTON.

AN ESSAY.

BY

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY.



WITH BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF MILTON AND MACAULAY, AN
EPITOME OF THE VIEWS OF THE BEST KNOWN CRITICS
OF MILTON, AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.

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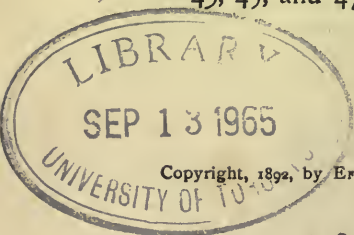
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LIFE OF MACAULAY.

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY, whose father was Zachary Macaulay—famous for his advocacy of the abolition of slavery, was born at Rothley Temple, in Leicestershire, towards the end of 1800. From his infancy he showed a precocity that was simply extraordinary. He not only acquired knowledge rapidly, but he possessed a marvelous power of working it up into literary form, and his facile pen produced compositions in prose and in verse, histories, odes, and hymns. From the time that he was three years old he read incessantly, for the most part lying on the rug before the fire with his book on the ground, and a piece of bread and butter in his hand. It is told of him that when a boy of four, and on a visit with his father, he was unfortunate enough to have a cup of hot coffee overturned on his legs, and when his hostess, in her sympathetic kindness, asked shortly after how he was feeling, he looked up in her face and said, "Thank you, madam, the agony is abated." At seven he wrote a compendium of Universal History. At eight he was so fired with the *Lay* and with *Marmion* that he wrote three cantos of a poem in imitation of Scott's manner, and called it the "Battle of Cheviot." And he had many other literary projects, in all of which he showed perfect correctness both in grammar and in spelling, made his meaning uniformly clear, and was scrupulously accurate in his punctuation.

With all this cleverness he was not conceited. His parents, and particularly his mother, were most judicious in their treatment. They never encouraged him to display his powers of conversation, and they abstained from every kind of remark that might help him to think himself different from other boys. One result was that throughout his life he was free from literary vanity; another was that he habitually overestimated the knowledge of others. When he said in his essays that every schoolboy knew

this and that fact in history, he was judging their information by his own vast intellectual stores.

At the age of twelve, Macaulay was sent to a private school in the neighborhood of Cambridge. There he laid the foundation of his future scholarship, and though fully occupied with his school work—chiefly Latin, Greek, and mathematics—he found time to gratify his insatiable thirst for general literature. He read at random and without restraint, but with an apparent partiality for the lighter and more attractive books. Poetry and prose fiction remained throughout his life his favorite reading. On subjects of this nature he displayed a most unerring memory, as well as the capacity for taking in at a glance the contents of a printed page. Whatever caught his fancy he remembered, as well as though he had consciously got it by heart. He once said, that if all the copies of *Paradise Lost* and the *Pilgrim's Progress* were to be destroyed, he would from memory alone undertake to reproduce both.

In 1818 Macaulay went from school to the university—to Trinity College, Cambridge. But here the studies were not to his mind. He had no liking for mathematics, and was nowhere as a mathematical student. His inclination was wholly for literature, and he gained various high distinctions in that department. It was unfortunate for him that he had no severe discipline in scientific method; to his disproportionate partiality for the lighter sides of literature must be attributed his want of philosophic grasp, his dislike to arduous speculations, and his want of courage in facing intellectual problems.

The private life of Cambridge had a much greater influence on him than the recognized studies of the place. He made many friends. His social qualities and his conversational powers were widely exercised and largely developed. He became, too, a brilliant member of the Union Debating Society, and here politics claimed his attention. Altogether he gave himself more to the enjoyment of all that was stirring around him than to the taking of university honors. In 1824, however, he was elected a Fellow, and began to take pupils. Further, he sought a wider field for his literary labors, and contributed papers to some of the maga-

zines—mostly to *Knight's Quarterly Magazine*. Chief among these contributions are "Ivry," and "Naseby" in spirited verse, and the conversation between Cowley and Milton, in as splendid prose.

When Macaulay went to Cambridge, his father seemed in affluent circumstances, but the slave-trade agitation engrossed his time and his energy, and by and by there came on the family commercial ruin. This was a blow to the eldest son, but he bore up bravely, brought sunshine and happiness into the depressed household, and proceeded to retrieve their position with stern fortitude. He ultimately paid off his father's debts.

Though called to the bar in 1826, he did not take kindly to the law, and soon renounced it for an employment more congenial—literature. Already in 1824 he had been invited to write for the *Edinburgh Review*, and in August, 1825, appeared in that magazine his article on Milton, which created a sensation, and made the critics aware of the advent of a new literary power. This first success he followed up rapidly, and besides giving new life to the periodical, he soon gained for himself a name of note. In 1828 he was made a Commissioner of Bankruptcy, and in 1830 was elected M.P. for Calne. In the Reformed Parliament he sat for Leeds.

He entered Parliament at an opportune period, and was in the thick of the great Reform conflict. His speeches on the Reform Bill raised him to the first rank as an orator, and gained for him official posts. It was while burdened with these severe public labors that he wrote thirteen (from Montgomery to Pitt) of the *Edinburgh Review* Essays. Thus he went on for four years, but the narrow circumstances of his family induced him to accept the lucrative post of legal adviser to the Supreme Council of India. This necessitated his going to India, which was clearly adverse to his prospects at home; yet the certainty of returning with £20,000 saved from his large salary was sufficient inducement to make the sacrifice, and he sailed February 15, 1834.

In India he maintained his reputation as a hard worker. Besides his official duties as a Member of Council, he undertook the additional burden of acting as chairman in two important committees, and it is in connection with one of these—the committee

appointed to draw up the new codes—that he has his chief title to fame as an Indian statesman. The New Penal Code was in great part his work, and proves his wide acquaintance with English Criminal Law. He also took great part in the work of the Committee of Public Instruction, and was chiefly instrumental in introducing English studies among the native population. But he was not popular in Calcutta. Certain changes he helped to introduce roused the feeling of the English residents against him, and he was attacked in the most scurrilous way.

In 1838 he was back in England. Meanwhile he had written two more essays for the *Edinburgh*, one on Mackintosh and one on Bacon, and he was hardly home when there appeared another, that on Sir W. Temple. After spending the winter in Italy, he reviewed in 1839 Mr. Gladstone's book on *Church and State*, and might have settled down to purely literary life, but once more he was drawn into politics. Elected as Member for Edinburgh, he was soon admitted into the Cabinet as Secretary-at-War to the Whig Ministry of Lord Melbourne. The position, however, was no gain to Macaulay. He purposed to write "*A History of England*, from the accession of King James II., down to a time which is within the memory of men still living," and his official duties forced him to lay this project aside for the present.

Fortunately Lord Melbourne's ministry did not last long; it fell in 1841, and Macaulay was released from office. Still retaining his seat for Edinburgh, and speaking occasionally in the House he was free to follow his natural bent.

His leisure hours were given as usual to essay-work for the *Edinburgh*, and he wrote in succession Clive, Hastings, Frederick the Great, Addison, Chatham, etc. But in 1844 his connection with the *Review* came to an end, and he wrote no more for the Blue and Yellow, as it was called. In 1841 he had put forth a volume of poems—the *Lays of Ancient Rome*—not without misgivings as to the result. But the fresh and vigorous language at once carried the volume into popularity, and it had an enormous sale.

On a change of government in 1846, Macaulay, at the request of Lord John Russell, again became a Cabinet Minister, this time

as Paymaster-General of the Army, and having to seek re-election from his constituents, went down to Scotland for the purpose. After a severe contest, and notwithstanding a growing unpopularity, he was successful. But at the general election of the following year the forces in opposition to him redoubled their energy, and he was defeated.

This was the real end of his political life. Although pressed to contest other seats, he resolutely declined, and for the next few years worked 'doggedly' at his *History*. In 1848 appeared the first two volumes, which had an immense success, 13,000 copies being sold in less than four months. The same year he was elected Lord Rector of Glasgow University. By 1852 the people of Edinburgh had repented the rejection of their famous Member, and took steps to re-elect him free of expense; and so thoroughly was the scheme carried out that Macaulay, without having made a single speech, and without having visited the city, was returned triumphantly at the top of the poll. Through the length and breadth of the land the news was hailed with satisfaction, as an act of justice for an undeserved slight in the past. The result was very flattering to Macaulay, but he never really returned to political life as in his younger days. Moreover, forty years of incessant intellectual labors had begun to undermine his health, and he was now unequal to the fatigues that formerly were a pleasure to him. Accordingly in 1856, after having brought out the third and fourth volumes of his history, of which in a few months 25,000 copies were sold, he resigned his seat, and yielding too late obedience to all interested in his welfare, gave himself up to the enjoyment of that ease which he had faithfully earned. Then in 1857 he was created a Peer—Baron Macaulay of Rothley, his birthplace. Still struggling on with his *History* in the intermissions of his malady, he died suddenly on December 28, 1859. He was only fifty-nine—the victim of an appetite for work, insatiable and unfortunately too long ungoverned,

MEMOIR OF JOHN MILTON (1608-1674).

NOTE.—As Macaulay takes a knowledge of Milton's life and times for granted in his essay, it is perhaps advisable to present to the pupil a brief but general survey of the history of the poet's time, especially in so far as the facts are referred to in the text. The narrative is an abstract of the lengthy Memoir of Milton prefixed by Professor Masson to his edition of *Milton's Poems*.

MILTON was born in 1608, in London. There he spent the first sixteen years of his life, the last sixteen of the reign of James I. In 1625, aged 17, and just after the accession of Charles I., he was admitted at Christ's College, Cambridge, where he studied for seven years, with industrious and persevering success.

On leaving the university, Milton went to reside in Buckinghamshire, at a small village not far from Windsor, called Horton, where his father, a London scrivener, who had by this time retired from business, had taken a country house. The disturbed state of politics—King Charles having quarreled with three parliaments, and now resolving to govern by his own authority—led Milton to give up his original intention of entering the Church, and he resolved to devote himself thenceforward exclusively to study, speculation, and literature. Six years of this life he saw here, producing at intervals the five poems belonging to his first period—*L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, *Arcades*, *Comus*, and *Lycidas*.

The quiet time at Horton brings him to his thirtieth year, and meanwhile Charles was busy with his new views on government. By the help of his chief advisers, Laud and Strafford, the King had inaugurated his *Reign of Thorough*, had repressed and persecuted Calvinistic theology, and all Puritan opinions, and had systematically promoted a high Prelacy and a ritualistic ceremonial of worship, which in the eyes of the Puritans brought the Church of England back into the shadow of the Church of Rome. The large mass of the population lay in a dumb agony of discontent,

sighing for a parliament but not daring to utter the word. With these Milton was in sympathy. And having his mind full of those subjects, he, in 1638, set out for Italy on a journey which extended over sixteen months. It was then that he wrote his Epistle to Manso (see page 26).

When he returned to England he found politics still worse. Charles, in forcing Episcopacy on Scotland, found the Scottish people not only stubbornly arrayed against him with their famous Covenant, but firmly resolved to abide by the old Presbyterian system of Knox. The king was bent on coercing them, and civil war had almost begun.

Milton did not stay long at Horton, but in 1640 removed to London, took a house there, and gave himself up to the educating of his two nephews, John and Edward Philips, the sons of his elder sister. Meantime troubles grew thick and fast in public affairs—Charles losing hold of his people, in open conflict with the Scots, and paving the way for his own destruction. All thoughts of poetry were driven out of Milton's mind by the dismal outlook; he was whirled into politics, and for twenty years (1640–1660) he figured as a prose writer. It was on the Church question that he first spoke out. The Long Parliament had executed Strafford, had imprisoned Laud, and had subjected Charles to constitutional checks. The only question for the time was as to the Church. All were agreed that Episcopacy as Laud wished it was not to be thought of. Some, however, advocated a limited Episcopacy, while others insisted on a Presbyterian reconstruction. These last were the Root and Branch Reformers, and it was in favor of their views that Milton launched his first pamphlet, *Of Reformation*, followed shortly afterwards by others (*Animadversions on the Remonstrant*, p. 79), which may be called his Anti-Episcopal Pamphlets.

In 1642 began the great Civil War. From that date Englishmen were divided into two opposed masses—the *Parliamentarians*, taking the side of the majority of the House of Commons, and the small minority of the House of Lords, which still sat on as the two Houses; and the *Royalists*, taking the side of the King and of the bulk of the nobility, with the minority of the Commons.

Milton, of course, was a resolute Parliamentary. Although he did not serve in the Parliamentary Army, he watched its progress with the keenest interest and sympathy.

In 1643 the poet married Mary Powell, whose family, strange as it may seem, were Royalists. The lady was very young, and, not taking readily to Milton's philosophical life, soon went home to her friends, and her husband could not induce her to return. Her conduct set Milton writing on the subject of divorce, and it was then that he enunciated the opinion that obstinate incompatibility of mind and temper between husband and wife is sufficient ground for their separation and marrying again. Two years later his wife returned to him, but this marriage was the greatest blunder of his life and the cause of much unhappiness.

Shortly after Milton's marriage, the Parliamentary party began to dispute among themselves on a subject which not only interfered with the prosecution of the war, but was of great consequence in the future history. This was the dispute between the Presbyterians and the Independents: Whether was the form of Church Government in England to be of the Scottish pattern with a gradation of Church Courts, from congregation and presbytery to the representative assembly, or on the congregational system, with every congregation independent within itself? A further question was: Must every one conform to the new Establishment, or is dissent to be tolerated? The majority of the English divines were in favor of strict Presbytery, but a considerable minority, finally swelled by the Baptists and a great many other sects that had lurked in English society since Elizabeth's time, held by the principle of liberty of conscience, and considered compulsory Presbyterianism as monstrous as Papacy. Strangely enough, Independency had come to prevail largely in the Parliamentary Army, and Cromwell was regarded as its head. Out of this antagonism grew various results. The Presbyterians viewed with suspicion the success of Cromwell and his army-Independents, and fearing ruin to England from the principle of toleration, if the King were won over to that side, they contented themselves with scheming to bring the King to terms with themselves rather than to beat him thoroughly. Cromwell, on the other hand, and

the Independents, were resolute to defeat the king at all hazards. Indeed, before 1644 was ended it was clear that the Independents were the more thorough-going revolutionists of the two, and they gradually became the stronger party. The army was remodeled, and under the new generals a more vigorous policy was pursued in the field, until, in 1645, Naseby virtually finished the war by the utter rout of the king.

In 1644 Milton published his *Areopagitica, or Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing*, addressed to the Parliament, and urging them to repeal an ordinance passed in 1643, for the regulation of the press by a staff of official censors. In this pamphlet it was evident that Milton was in complete political sympathy with the Independents. Moreover, his writings on Divorce had driven him into open war with the Presbyterians.

After Naseby, Charles gave himself up to the Scots—auxiliaries of the Parliamentary Army, but, of course, Presbyterian in opinion—and this complicated the struggle. The Presbyterians wished to treat with him for a strict and universal Presbytery in England without toleration; and this being quite opposed to Independent opinion, made the Independents furious against the King. Finally, the Scots handed him over to Cromwell's army, and the quarrel between the two parties became hotter than ever. The war was over, and the Presbyterians clamored for disbanding the army. But it refused to be disbanded, and so violent grew the dispute that at last the army disowned parliamentary authority, marched to London, and was master of the situation. Cromwell and the other chiefs tried negotiations with the king, but these were futile. He escaped to the Isle of Wight, and made a secret treaty with the Scots that he would confirm Presbyterian government in England and suppress the Independents. The Scots invaded England to restore Charles to his rights, and in 1648 the Second Civil War began.

But Cromwell was equal to the occasion. He defeated the Scots at Preston. The parliamentary army brought Charles back from the Isle of Wight, purged the parliament of antagonistic members, and compelled the parliament so purged to set up a High Court of Justice for trying the king. Charles's doom was sealed,

and though many of even the Independents shrank from the deed, he was executed, January 30, 1649. England then became a republic—governed by the Rump of the Long Parliament, *i.e.*, the remnant of the House of Commons that the army had left in existence—in conjunction with a Council of State, or ministry of forty-five members of the Rump.

To this republic Milton gave a speedy adhesion, by publishing a thorough-going republican pamphlet, defending the recent proceedings of the English army, and containing a severe invective against Charles. The consequence was that there was at once offered to him the post of *Secretary for Foreign Tongues*, or *Latin Secretary* to the Council. He accepted the post, and for several years had a good deal to do in drafting Latin letters to foreign governments, as well as in conducting other official and diplomatic business. Further, as he was known by the Council to be a fitting literary champion of the still-struggling Commonwealth, he was often requested by them to come forward in this capacity, and accordingly produced his *Iconoclastes* and his *Defensio pro Populo Anglicano*. The first (*The Image-Breaker*) was an answer to the *Eikon Basilike* (Royal Image), a book professing to be meditations and prayers written by Charles I. in his last years. The *King's Book*, though now known to be a fabrication in his interest, was then all but universally believed in, and had a wide circulation, so that Milton's answer, which mercilessly criticised both the book and the dead king, was a signal service to the government. The other, the *Defensio* (Defense of the People of England), was even of greater moment. It was published in 1651, in reply to the *Defensio Regis*, or Defense of Charles I., an attack on the English Commonwealth, which had been published in Holland the year before by the Leyden Professor, Salmasius, at the instance of Charles II. Never in the world had one human being inflicted on another a more ruthless or appalling castigation, and Milton suddenly became famous.

Meanwhile Cromwell, a member of the Council from the first, had been Lord-Lieutenant in Ireland, had conquered the Scots at Dunbar (1650), and finally crushed out rebellion in the great battle of Worcester (1651), and was back in London again, hailed as the

saviour of the Commonwealth and the supreme chief of England. The young king was again in exile, and the Commonwealth was to all appearance stable and powerful.

In 1652 a great disaster fell on Milton—he became totally blind. The blindness, which had been gradually coming on for some years, was accelerated by his persisting to write his answer to Salmasius, in spite of the warnings of his physicians. Henceforth, though still nominally in full rank as Foreign Secretary, he had to be greatly assisted in his work (see p. 79). To increase his troubles, in 1654 his wife died, leaving him with three daughters; and though he married again in 1656, this second wife died in little more than a year. So that in 1658 we find him at the age of fifty a widower with three uncared-for daughters, the eldest not twelve years old. The sequel was tragic, both for him and for them.

In 1653 the Commonwealth as originally constituted was superseded, and Cromwell became, first Dictator and then Protector—a position which he held till his death in 1658. The cause for this change was as follows. The Rump had been a mere makeshift for a parliament, and Cromwell and the all-powerful army at his back made up their minds that the time was ripe for a more regular government. But there were misunderstandings, and nothing could be done till Cromwell entered the House with a body of musketeers and forcibly dislodged the fifty-two obstreperous members—all that were left of the original Long Parliament. He also dissolved the Council of State. Then, after ruling by the aid of a council of his officers for some nine months as a kind of dictator, he assumed a protectorate, and became “Lord Protector” (p. 68).

Now, however, although all England, Scotland, and Ireland were obliged to acquiesce in his supremacy, yet the Oliverians, as his more thorough-going adherents were called, were but a section of the original army-men and republicans. To many, “the Protector” was but a king with a new name, and they condemned the change as opposed to true republicanism. Milton, however, was on the whole an Oliverian, and regarded the Protectorate as the most effective embodiment for the time of republican princi-

ples. He was consequently continued in his Latin Secretaryship, and lost no opportunity of striking a blow, by pamphlets or otherwise, in behalf of his favorite opinions. But in 1658 Cromwell died, and under Richard, his son and successor, republicanism was at a discount. Notwithstanding Milton's best efforts to uphold "the good old cause," monarchical principles triumphed, so that after the period of anarchy described by Macaulay at page 66, there came, in 1660, the Restoration.

The tables were turned. Milton had fought for a dying cause, and the wonder is, that when all the leading Regicides suffered death, he too was not hanged. For some time he was in real danger, but the new government contented themselves with burning his books, and left him free to resume his poetical labors—interrupted for twenty years by the stress of politics.

His remaining days were spent for the most part on *Paradise Lost*—begun in 1658. Visited by a few Nonconformist friends, and assisted by his nephews, or the Quaker Ellwood, he gradually elaborated his work notwithstanding his adverse circumstances—

"On evil days now fallen and evil tongues,
In darkness and with dangers compassed round,
And solitude."

His home was not a happy one. His three girls had grown up ill-looking after, and but slenderly educated. The eldest, who was lame and deformed, could not write; and the other two could write but indifferently, so that Milton can hardly have employed them as amanuenses. He, however, exacted from them service which they found irksome. He made them read to him in six or seven languages, though they themselves did not understand a word. This drove them into rebellion: they deserted him, cheated him, and despised him, till Milton once more took refuge in marriage. His third wife proved a very excellent and careful one.

Paradise Lost was finished in 1665, and published in 1667. Then, in 1671, appeared both *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. Milton died of "gout struck in," on November 8, 1674.

MACAULAY'S ESSAY ON MILTON.

Joannis Miltoni, Angli, de Doctrina Christiana libri duo posthumi. A Treatise on Christian Doctrine, compiled from the Holy Scriptures alone. By JOHN MILTON; translated from the original by Charles R. Sumner, M. A., etc., etc. 1825.

NOTE.—The student is advised to read the sketch of Milton's life before reading this Essay.

TOWARDS the close of the year 1823, Mr. Lemon, Deputy-keeper of the State Papers, in the course of his researches among the presses of his office, met with a large Latin manuscript. With it were found corrected copies of the foreign despatches written by Milton while he filled the office of Secretary, and several papers relating to the Popish Trials

1. The opening sentence is a good example of one of Macaulay's characteristics. It is a statement apparently quite foreign to the theme of the essay. We expect some account of Milton's early days, or some explanation of the author's motive in choosing such a subject; but instead of that, we get a vague general affirmation as to the discovery of a Latin manuscript. We shall gradually see the bearing of this as we go on, but meantime it suffices to excite our curiosity; our interest is aroused, and we are anxious to push on to further explanations. Macaulay never loses an opportunity of thus quickening the attention; and this method is one of his favorite devices, applied alike in sentences, in paragraphs, and as here, in whole discourses. Moreover, the sentence itself, as a sentence, is a fair example of the same principle; it is *periodic*, and the emphatic point is kept till the end.

6. After the execution of Charles I. in 1649, Milton was appointed Secretary to the Council of State. This office corresponds to the present English Foreign Secretary. The official language in those days was Latin.

and the Rye-house Plot. The whole was wrapped up in an envelope, superscribed "To Mr. Skinner, Merchant." On examination, the large manuscript proved to be the long-lost Essay on the Doctrines of Christianity, which, according to 5 Wood and Toland, Milton finished after the Restoration, and deposited with Cyriac Skinner. Skinner, it is well known, held the same political opinions with his illustrious friend. It is therefore probable, as Mr. Lemon conjectures, that he may have fallen under the suspicions of the government during 10 that persecution of the Whigs which followed the dissolution of the Oxford Parliament, and that, in consequence of a general seizure of his papers, this work may have been brought to the office in which it has been found. But whatever the adventures of the manuscript may have been, no doubt can 15 exist that it is a genuine relic of the great poet.

Mr. Sumner, who was commanded by His Majesty to edit and translate the treatise, has acquitted himself of his task in a manner honorable to his talents and to his character. His version is not indeed very easy or elegant; but it is entitled 20 to the praise of clearness and fidelity. His notes abound with interesting quotations, and have the rare merit of really elucidating the text. The preface is evidently the work of a sensible and candid man, firm in his own religious opinions, and tolerant towards those of others.

25 The book itself will not add much to the fame of Milton. It is, like all his Latin works, well written—though not exactly in the style of the prize essays of Oxford and Cambridge. There is no elaborate imitation of classical antiquity, no scrupulous purity, none of the ceremonial cleanness which characterizes the diction of our academical Pharisees. The author 30 does not attempt to polish and brighten his composition into

1. A Whig plot to assassinate Charles II., on his return from New Market. It was discovered, and several persons, notably Lord William Russell and Algernon Sidney, suffered death.

27. Oxford and Cambridge. The two famous English universities.

the Ciceronian gloss and brilliancy. He does not, in short, sacrifice sense and spirit to pedantic refinements. The nature of his subject compelled him to use many words

“ That would have made Quintilian stare and gasp.”

But he writes with as much ease and freedom as if Latin were⁵ his mother-tongue ; and where he is least happy, his failure seems to arise from the carelessness of a native, not from the ignorance of a foreigner. What Denham, with great felicity, says of Cowley, may be applied to him. He wears the garb but not the clothes of the ancients.

Throughout the volume are discernible the traces of a¹⁰ powerful and independent mind, emancipated from the influence of authority, and devoted to the search of truth. He professes to form his system from the Bible alone ; and his digest of scriptural texts is certainly among the best that have¹⁵ appeared. But he is not always so happy in his inferences as in his citations.

Some of the heterodox opinions which he avows seem to have excited considerable amazement ; particularly his Arianism, and his notions on the subject of polygamy. Yet we can²⁰ scarcely conceive that any person could have read the *Paradise Lost* without suspecting him of the former ; nor do we think that any reader, acquainted with the history of his life, ought

1. Cicero (106-43 B.C.). The greatest orator of Rome, whose works show the Latin language in its greatest perfection.

4. Quintilian (40-118, A.D.). A famous Roman teacher of rhetoric, and author of an exhaustive treatise on that subject. The line is from one of Milton's sonnets.

8. Denham, Sir John (1615-1668). A poet contemporary with Milton. His chief work is *Cooper's Hill*, a contemplative poem on the view over the Thames, from a hill near Windsor Castle.

9. Cowley, Abraham (1618-1667). Also a poet of the same time, more famous perhaps as a writer of prose essays. His poetry is fantastical and extravagant.

18. Heterodox. Deviating from established opinion, opposed to “ orthodox ”

19. Arianism. The doctrines of the followers of Arius (fourth century ; A.D.) Their heterodox opinions related to the subject of the Incarnation.

20. Polygamy. Milton had peculiar views on the subject of divorce, prompted in him by the conduct of his first wife (see *Memoir of Milton*, p. 10).

to be much startled at the latter. The opinions which he has expressed respecting the nature of the Deity, the eternity of matter, and the observation of the Sabbath; might, we think, have caused more just surprise.

- 5 But we will not go into the discussion of these points. The book, were it far more orthodox, or far more heretical than it is, would not much edify or corrupt the present generation. The men of our time are not to be converted or perverted by quartos. A few more days, and this essay will follow the
 10 *Defensio Populi* to the dust and silence of the upper shelf. The name of its author, and the remarkable circumstances attending its publication, will secure to it a certain degree of attention. For a month or two it will occupy a few minutes of chat in every drawing-room, and a few columns in every
 15 Magazine; and it will then, to borrow the elegant language of the play-bills, be withdrawn, to make room for the forthcoming novelties.

We wish, however, to avail ourselves of the interest, transient as it may be, which this work has excited. The dexterous
 20 Capuchins never choose to preach on the life and miracles of a saint, till they have awakened the devotional feelings of their auditors, by exhibiting some relic of him—a thread of his garment, a lock of his hair, or a drop of his blood. On the same principle, we intend to take advantage of the
 25 late interesting discovery, and, while this memorial of a great and good man is still in the hands of all, to say something of his moral and intellectual qualities. Nor, we are convinced, will the severest of our readers blame us if, on an occasion like the present, we turn, for a short time from the

9. *Quartos*. Books in which every sheet, being twice folded, makes four leaves, generally written 4to. So octavo, 8vo, where every sheet is folded into eight leaves; duodecimo, 12mo, into twelve.

10. *Defensio Populi*. A *Defense of the People of England*—a work by Milton in Latin, written to justify the English people in executing Charles I.

20. *Capuchins*. A nickname given to a branch of the Franciscan order of monks, from the *Capuce* or pointed cowl which they wore in imitation of St. Francis.

topics of the day, to commemorate, in all love and reverence, the genius and virtues of John Milton, the poet, the statesman, the philosopher, the glory of English literature, the champion and the martyr of English liberty.

It is by his poetry that Milton is best known; and it is of his poetry that we wish first to speak. By the general suffrage of the civilized world, his place has been assigned among the greatest masters of the art. His detractors, however, though outvoted, have not been silenced. There are many critics, and some of great name, who contrive in the same ¹⁰ breath to extol the poems and to decry the poet. The works, they acknowledge, considered in themselves, may be classed among the noblest productions of the human mind. But they will not allow the author to rank with those great men who, born in the infancy of civilization, supplied, by their own ¹⁵ powers, the want of instruction, and, though destitute of models themselves, bequeathed to posterity models which defy imitation. Milton, it is said, inherited what his predecessors created; he lived in an enlightened age; he received a finished education; and we must therefore, if we would form a just ²⁰ estimate of his powers, make large deductions for these advantages.

We venture to say, on the contrary, paradoxical as the remark may appear, that no poet has ever had to struggle with more unfavorable circumstances than Milton. He doubted, ²⁵ as he has himself owned, whether he had not been born "an age too late." For this notion Johnson has thought fit to make him the butt of his clumsy ridicule. The poet, we believe, understood the nature of his art better than the critic. He knew that his poetical genius derived no advantage from the ³⁰

27. Johnson, Dr. Samuel (1709-1784). One of the most famous literary men of the eighteenth century. He wrote the first English Dictionary; edited a periodical called the *Rambler*, etc. The work in which he ridiculed Milton is his *Lives of the Poets*, a book containing as much criticism as biography, and dealing with all the English poets from Cowley to Gray, chief amongst whom are Milton, Pope, Dryden, Addison, and Swift. Johnson was unjust to Milton's poetry.

civilization which surrounded him, or from the learning which he had acquired; and he looked back with something like regret to the ruder age of simple words and vivid impressions.

We think that, as civilization advances, poetry almost necessarily declines. Therefore, though we admire those great works of imagination which have appeared in dark ages, we do not admire them the more because they have appeared in dark ages. On the contrary, we hold that the most wonderful and splendid proof of genius is a great poem produced in a
 10 civilized age. We cannot understand why those who believe in that most orthodox article of literary faith, that the earliest poets are generally the best, should wonder at the rule as if it were the exception. Surely the uniformity of the phenomenon indicates a corresponding uniformity in the cause.

15 The fact is, that common observers reason from the progress of the experimental sciences to that of the imitative arts. The improvement of the former is gradual and slow. Ages are spent in collecting materials, ages more in separating and combining them. Even when a system has been formed, there
 20 is still something to add, to alter, or to reject. Every generation enjoys the use of a vast hoard bequeathed to it by antiquity, and transmits it, augmented by fresh acquisitions, to future ages. In these pursuits, therefore, the first speculators lie under great disadvantages, and, even when they fail,
 25 are entitled to praise. Their pupils, with far inferior intellectual powers, speedily surpass them in actual attainments. Every girl who has read Mrs. Marcet's *Little Dialogues on Political Economy*, could teach Montagu or Walpole many

27. **Mrs. Marcet** (1769-1858). A writer on educational topics. Besides her conversations on political economy, she wrote others on chemistry, natural philosophy, etc. *Political economy* is the science of the laws that regulate the distribution of wealth.

28. **Montagu**, Charles, Earl of Halifax (1661-1715), was Chancellor of the Exchequer in William III.'s reign. He distinguished himself as a financier by establishing the Bank of England.

29. **Walpole**, Sir Robert (1676-1745). Also a Chancellor of the Exchequer, under George I. and George II. His financial ability was displayed in connection with the South Sea Scheme.

lessons in finance. Any intelligent man may now, by resolutely applying himself for a few years to mathematics, learn more than the great Newton knew after half a century of study and meditation.

But it is not thus with music, with painting, or with sculpture. Still less is it thus with poetry. The progress of refinement rarely supplies these arts with better objects of imitation. It may indeed improve the instruments which are necessary to the mechanical operations of the musician, the sculptor, and the painter. But language, the machine of the poet, is best fitted for his purpose in its rudest state. Nations, like individuals, first perceive, and then abstract. They advance from particular images to general terms. Hence the vocabulary of an enlightened society is philosophical, that of a half-civilized people is poetical. 15

This change in the language of men is partly the cause and partly the effect of a corresponding change in the nature of their intellectual operations, a change by which science gains and poetry loses. Generalization is necessary to the advancement of knowledge, but particularity is indispensable to the creations of the imagination. In proportion as men know more and think more, they look less at individuals and more at classes. They therefore make better theories and worse poems. They give us vague phrases instead of images, and personified qualities instead of men. They may be better able 25 to analyze human nature than their predecessors. But analysis is not the business of the poet. His office is to portray, not to dissect. He may believe in a moral sense, like Shaftesbury.

3 Newton, Sir Isaac (1642-1727). Famous as mathematician and natural philosopher. He discovered the law of universal gravitation, extended the higher mathematics, and made original investigations into the nature of light.

28 Shaftesbury, Earl of (1671-1713). An English philosopher, the friend of the poet Pope, and author of several philosophical treatises named "Characteristics." He assumed a certain internal sense (the Moral Sense) as perceiving both the beautiful and the good.

He may refer all human actions to self-interest like Helvetius, or he may never think about the matter at all. His creed on such subjects will no more influence his poetry, properly so called, than the notions which a painter may have conceived
 5 respecting the lachrymal glands, or the circulation of the blood, will affect the tears of his Niobe, or the blushes of his Aurora. If Shakespeare had written a book on the motives of human actions, it is by no means certain that it would have been a good one. It is extremely improbable that it would have
 10 contained half so much able reasoning on the subject as is to be found in the fable of *The Bees*. But could Mandeville have created an Iago? Well as he knew how to resolve characters into their elements, would he have been able to combine those elements in such a manner as to make up a man—a real, liv-
 15 ing, individual man?

Perhaps no person can be a poet, or can even enjoy poetry, without a certain unsoundness of mind, if anything which gives so much pleasure ought to be called unsoundness. By poetry we mean, not, of course, all writing in verse, nor even
 20 all good writing in verse. Our definition excludes many metrical compositions which, on other grounds, deserve the highest praise. By poetry we mean, the art of employing words in such a manner as to produce an illusion on the imagination, the art of doing by means of words what the painter does by

1. **Helvetius** (1715-1771). A French philosopher, one of whose leading tenets was that all human conduct is grounded in self-interest.

5. **Lachryal Glands**. The vessels of the eye that secrete the tears.

6. **Niobe**. A character in Greek mythology. She had twelve children, and taunted Latona because she had only two, Apollo and Diana. Latona in revenge caused all Niobe's children to be destroyed. Niobe was inconsolable, wept herself to death and was changed into stone. The name came to be a personification of female sorrow, and the legend was a favorite subject in ancient sculpture.

7. **Aurora**. The goddess of early morning, called by Homer "rosy-fingered." According to the Greek myth, she set out before the sun, and was the pioneer of his rising.

11. **Mandeville**, Bernard de (1670-1733). A writer on social subjects, and author of the *Fable of the Bees*, a satire enforcing the dictum that civilization is based on the vices of society.

12. **Iago**. A leading character in Shakespeare's *Othello* and the type of an artful villain of the blackest dye.

means of colors. Thus the greatest of poets has described it, in lines universally admired for the vigor and felicity of their diction, and still more valuable on account of the just notion which they convey of the art in which he excelled :

“ As imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.”

5

—*Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act V., sc. 1.

These are the fruits of the “ fine frenzy ” which he ascribes to 10 the poet—a fine frenzy, doubtless, but still a frenzy. Truth, indeed, is essential to poetry ; but it is the truth of madness. The reasonings are just ; but the premises are false. After the first suppositions have been made, everything ought to be consistent ; but those first suppositions require a degree of credulity 15 which almost amounts to a partial and temporary derangement of the intellect. Hence, of all people, children are the most imaginative. They abandon themselves without reserve to every illusion. Every image which is strongly presented to their mental eye produces on them the effect of reality. No 20 man, whatever his sensibility may be, is ever affected by Hamlet or Lear, as a little girl is affected by the story of poor Red Riding-hood. She knows that it is all false, that wolves cannot speak, that there are no wolves in England. Yet, in spite of her knowledge, she believes ; she weeps, she trembles ; 25 she dares not go into a dark room lest she should feel the teeth of the monster at her throat. Such is the despotism of the imagination over uncultivated minds.

In a rude state of society, men are children with a greater variety of ideas. It is therefore in such a state of society that 30 we may expect to find the poetical temperament in its highest perfection. In an enlightened age there will be much intelli-

1. The greatest of poets, Shakespeare, in *Midsummer Nights Dream*.

22. Hamlet and Lear. Two of Shakespeare's great tragedies.

gence, much science, much philosophy, abundance of just classification and subtle analysis, abundance of wit and eloquence, abundance of verses, and even of good ones—but little poetry. Men will judge and compare; but they will not create. They
 5 will talk about the old poets, and comment on them, and to a certain degree enjoy them. But they will scarcely be able to conceive the effect which poetry produced on their ruder ancestors, the agony, the ecstasy, the plenitude of belief. The Greek rhapsodists, according to Plato, could not recite Homer
 10 without almost falling into convulsions. The Mohawk hardly feels the scalping-knife while he shouts his death-song. The power which the ancient bards of Wales and Germany exercised over their auditors seems to modern readers almost miraculous. Such feelings are very rare in a civilized community, and most
 15 rare among those who participate most in its improvements. They linger longest among the peasantry.

Poetry produces an illusion on the eye of the mind, as a magic-lantern produces an illusion on the eye of the body. And, as the magic-lantern acts best in a dark room, poetry
 20 effects its purpose most completely in a dark age. As the light of knowledge breaks in upon its exhibitions, as the outlines of certainty become more and more definite, and the shades of probability more and more distinct, the hues and lineaments of the phantoms which it calls up, grow fainter and
 25 fainter. We cannot unite the incompatible advantages of reality and deception, the clear discernment of truth and the exquisite enjoyment of fiction.

He who, in an enlightened and literary society, aspires to be a great poet, must first become a little child. He must take

9. **Greek Rhapsodists** were bards who collected pieces of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* enough to make a "ballad," and sang them as our own minstrels sang the deeds of famous heroes. (Greek *rhapto*, to string together, and *odē*, a song).

9. **Plato** (429-347 B.C.). A Greek philosopher of great note.

9. **Homer**. The author of the two first and greatest epic poems, which are written in Greek, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

10. **Mohawks**. A tribe of North American Indians.

to pieces the whole web of his mind. He must unlearn much of that knowledge which has perhaps constituted hitherto his chief title to superiority. His very talents will be a hinderance to him. His difficulties will be proportioned to his proficiency in the pursuits which are fashionable among his contemporaries ; and that proficiency will in general be proportioned to the vigor and activity of his mind. And it is well if, after all his sacrifices and exertions, his works do not resemble a lisping man, or a modern ruin. We have seen in our own time great talents, intense labor, and long meditation,¹⁰ employed in this struggle against the spirit of the age, and employed, we will not say absolutely in vain, but with dubious success and feeble applause.

If these reasonings be just, no poet has ever triumphed over greater difficulties than Milton. He received a learned education.¹⁵ He was a profound and elegant classical scholar ; he had studied all the mysteries of Rabbinical literature ; he was intimately acquainted with every language of modern Europe from which either pleasure or information was then to be derived. He was perhaps the only great poet of later times who²⁰ has been distinguished by the excellence of his Latin verse. The genius of Petrarch was scarcely of the first order ; and his poems in the ancient language, though much praised by those who have never read them, are wretched compositions. Cowley, with all his admirable wit and ingenuity, had little imagination ; nor indeed do we think his classical diction compar-²⁵able to that of Milton. The authority of Johnson is against us on this point. But Johnson had studied the bad writers of the middle ages till he had become utterly insensible to the Augus-

17. **Rabbinical literature.** Literature connected with the doctrine of the Rabbins (*Rabbi*, Heb. "my master"), the Jewish masters of the law.

22. **Petrarch** (1304-1374). Italy's first and greatest lyrical poet.

24. See note page 17.

29. **Augustan.** So called from the Roman Emperor Augustus (63 B.C.-14 A.D.), whose reign was marked by great excellence of art and literature. The Augustan age of English literature, i.e. its best period, is usually said to date from the beginning of Elizabeth's reign to the Restoration.

tan elegance, and was as ill qualified to judge between two Latin styles, as a habitual drunkard to set up for a wine-taster.

Versification in a dead language is an exotic, a far-fetched, costly, sickly imitation of that which elsewhere may be found in healthful and spontaneous perfection. The soils on which this rarity flourishes are, in general, as ill-suited to the production of vigorous native poetry as the flower-pots of a hot-house to the growth of oaks. That the author of the *Paradise Lost* should have written the *Epistle to Manso* was truly wonderful. Never before were such marked originality and such exquisite mimicry found together. Indeed, in all the Latin poems of Milton, the artificial manner indispensable to such works is admirably preserved; while, at the same time, the richness of his fancy and the elevation of his sentiments give to them a peculiar charm, an air of nobleness and freedom, which distinguishes them from all other writings of the same class. They remind us of the amusements of those angelic warriors who composed the cohort of Gabriel :

“ About him exercised heroic games
The unarmed youth of heaven. But o'er their heads
Celestial armory, shield, helm, and spear,
Hung bright, with diamond flaming and with gold.”

—*Paradise Lost*, iv. 551-554.

We cannot look upon the sportive exercises for which the genius of Milton ungirds itself, without catching a glimpse of the gorgeous and terrible panoply which it is accustomed to wear. The strength of his imagination triumphed over every obstacle. So intense and ardent was the fire of his mind, that it not only was not suffocated beneath the weight of its fuel, but penetrated the whole superincumbent mass with its own heat and radiance.

It is not our intention to attempt anything like a complete examination of the poetry of Milton. The public has long

9. *Epistle to Manso*. A Latin poem, addressed by Milton, when in Italy, to Manso the Marquis of Villa, a friend of the Italian poet Tasso.

been agreed as to the merit of the most remarkable passages, the incomparable harmony of the numbers, and the excellence of that style which no rival has been able to equal, and no parodist to degrade, which displays in their highest perfection the idiomatic powers of the English tongue, and to which every ancient and every modern language has contributed something of grace, of energy, or of music. In the vast field of criticism on which we are entering, innumerable reapers have already put their sickles. Yet the harvest is so abundant that the negligent search of a straggling gleaner may be rewarded with a sheaf.

The most striking characteristic of the poetry of Milton is the extreme remoteness of the associations by means of which it acts on the reader. Its effect is produced, not so much by what it expresses as by what it suggests, not so much by the ideas which it directly conveys, as by other ideas which are connected with them. He electrifies the mind through conductors. The most unimaginative man must understand the *Iliad*. Homer gives him no choice, and requires from him no exertion; but takes the whole upon himself, and sets his images in so clear a light that it is impossible to be blind to them. The works of Milton cannot be comprehended or enjoyed, unless the mind of the reader co-operate with that of the writer. He does not paint a finished picture or play for a mere passive listener. He sketches, and leaves others to fill up the outline. He strikes the key-note, and expects his hearer to make out the melody.

We often hear of the magical influence of poetry. The expression in general means nothing, but, applied to the writings of Milton, it is most appropriate. His poetry acts like an incantation. Its merit lies less in its obvious meaning than in its occult power. There would seem, at first sight, to be no more in his words than in other words. But they are words of enchantment. No sooner are they pronounced, than the past is present, and the distant near. New forms of beauty

start at once into existence, and all the burial-places of the memory give up their dead. Change the structure of the sentence ; substitute one synonym for another, and the whole effect is destroyed. The spell loses its power; and he who should then hope to conjure with it, would find himself as much mistaken as Cassim in the Arabian tale, when he stood crying : "Open Wheat," "Open Barley," to the door which obeyed no sound but "Open Sesame !" The miserable failure of Dryden, in his attempt to rewrite some parts of the *Paradise Lost*, is a remarkable instance of this.

In support of these observations, we may remark that scarcely any passages in the poems of Milton are more generally known, or more frequently repeated, than those which are little more than muster-rolls of names. They are not always more appropriate or more melodious than other names. But they are charmed names. Every one of them is the first link in a long chain of associated ideas. Like the dwelling-place of our infancy revisited in manhood, like the song of our country heard in a strange land, they produce upon us an effect wholly independent of their intrinsic value. One transports us back to a remote period of history. Another places us among the novel scenes and manners of a distant country. A third evokes all the dear classical recollections of childhood, the school-room, the dog-eared Virgil, the holiday, and the prize. A fourth brings before us the splendid phantoms of chivalrous romance, the trophied lists, the embroidered hous-

8. **Sesame** (three syllables). An oily grain originally from India, and now used in Egypt, and elsewhere in the East. The reference here is to the tale of "The Forty Thieves," in the "Arabian Nights." "Open Sesame," was the charm by which the door of the robber's dungeon flew open.

9. **Dryden**, John (1631-1700). An eminent English poet who translated Virgil's "*Æneid*," and wrote "The Hind and Panther," etc. Macaulay's reference is to Dryden's opera, based on "*Paradise Lost*" and called "The State of Innocence and Fall of Man." Dryden asked Milton's leave to adapt "*Paradise Lost*" and was answered with a good-humored "Ay, you may tag my verses."

24. **Dog-eared**. The leaves of the volume being crumpled and turned down at the corners, something like the ears of a dog. *Virgil* (70-19 B. C.), the author of the greatest epic poem in Latin (*Æneid*), as Homer in Greek.

26. **Housings**. Cloths originally used to keep off dust, afterwards added to saddles as ornamental.

ings, the quaint devices, the haunted forests, the enchanted gardens, the achievements of enamored knights, and the smiles of rescued princesses.

In none of the works of Milton is his peculiar manner more happily displayed than in the *Allegro* and the *Penseroso*. It is impossible to conceive that the mechanism of language can be brought to a more exquisite degree of perfection. These poems differ from others as otter of roses differs from ordinary rose-water, the close-packed essence from the thin-diluted mixture. They are, indeed, not so much poems as collections of hints, from each of which the reader is to make out a poem for himself. Every epithet is a text for a canto.

The *Comus* and the *Samson Agonistes* are works which, though of very different merit, offer some marked points of resemblance. They are both lyric poems in the form of plays. There are perhaps no two kinds of composition so essentially dissimilar as the drama and the ode. The business of the dramatist is to keep himself out of sight, and to let nothing appear but his characters. As soon as he attracts notice to his personal feelings, the illusion is broken. The effect is as unpleasant as that which is produced on the stage by the voice of a prompter, or the entrance of a scene-shifter. Hence it was that the tragedies of Byron were his least successful performances. They resemble those pasteboard pictures invented by the friend of children, Mr. Newberry, in which a single movable head goes round twenty different bodies; so that the same face looks out upon us successively, from the uniform of a hussar, the furs of a judge, and the rags of a beggar. In all the characters—patriots and tyrants, haters and lovers—

5. *Allegro* and *Penseroso*. Two companion lyric poems by Milton, dealing with the contrast of "mirth" and "melancholy."

23. *Byron*, Lord (1788-1824). One of the great names in English poetry. His tragedies here referred to are *Marino Faliero*, the *Two Foscari*, *Manfred*, *Sardanapalus*, *Caïn*, and *Werner*. Compare Prof. Nichol's dictum on these. "His so-called dramas are only poems divided into chapters" (Byron, "English Men of Letters," p. 142). Byron's chief poem is "Childe Harold."

the frown and sneer of Harold were discernible in an instant. But this species of egotism, though fatal to the drama, is the inspiration of the ode. It is the part of the lyric poet to abandon himself, without reserve, to his own emotions.

5 Between these hostile elements many great men have endeavored to effect an amalgamation, but never with complete success. The Greek drama, on the model of which the *Samson* was written, sprung from the ode. The dialogue was engrafted on the chorus, and naturally partook of its character. The genius of the greatest of the Athenian dramatists
 10 co-operated with the circumstances under which tragedy made its first appearance. Æschylus was, head and heart, a lyric poet. In his time, the Greeks had far more intercourse with the East than in the days of Homer; and they had not yet
 15 acquired that immense superiority in war, in science, and in the arts, which, in the following generation, led them to treat the Asiatics with contempt. From the narrative of Herodotus, it should seem that they still looked up with the veneration of disciples to Egypt and Assyria. At this period, accordingly,
 20 it was natural that the literature of Greece should be tinged with the Oriental style. And that style, we think, is clearly discernible in the works of Pindar and Æschylus. The latter often reminds us of the Hebrew writers. The Book of Job, indeed, in conduct and diction, bears a considerable resemblance to some of his dramas. Considered as plays, his works
 25 are absurd: considered as choruses, they are above all praise. If, for instance, we examine the address of Clytemnestra to Agamemnon on his return, or the description of the seven Argive chiefs, by the principles of dramatic writing, we shall

12. Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, are the three great Greek Tragedians; they flourished in the fifth century before Christ.

17. Herodotus. Contemporary in Greece with the three above, but famous as a historian—the oldest of Greek historians.

22. Pindar. Also a contemporary, but his field was lyric poetry. Poems in imitation of his manner, in a lofty style, and introducing various meters, are called *Pindaric odes*. Cf. Gray's "Bard."

27. Clytemnestra, Agamemnon. Personages in Æschylus' tragedy of "Agamemnon."

instantly condemn them as monstrous. But, if we forget the characters, and think only of the poetry, we shall admit that it has never been surpassed in energy and magnificence. Sophocles made the Greek drama as dramatic as was consistent with its original form. His portraits of men have a sort of similarity; but it is the similarity, not of a painting, but of a bas-relief. It suggests a resemblance, but it does not produce an illusion. Euripides attempted to carry the reform further. But it was a task far beyond his powers, perhaps beyond any powers. Instead of correcting what was bad, he destroyed what was excellent. He substituted crutches for stilts, bad sermons for good odes.

Milton, it is well known, admired Euripides highly—much more highly than, in our opinion, Euripides deserved. Indeed the caresses which this partiality leads him to bestow on “sad Electra’s poet,” sometimes remind us of the beautiful Queen of Fairyland kissing the long ears of Bottom. At all events, there can be no doubt that his veneration for the Athenian, whether just or not, was injurious to the *Samson Agonistes*. Had he taken Æschylus for his model, he would have given himself up to the lyric inspiration, and poured out profusely all the treasures of his mind, without bestowing a thought on those dramatic proprieties which the nature of the work rendered it impossible to preserve. In the attempt to reconcile things in their own nature inconsistent, he has failed, as every one else must have failed. We cannot identify ourselves with the characters as in a good play. We cannot identify ourselves with the poet, as in a good ode. The conflicting ingredients, like an acid and an alkali mixed, neutralize each other. We

15. “Sad Electra’s poet.” Euripides. One of his plays is called *Electra*.

17. *Bottom*. The weaver in Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. He is represented in one part of the play with an ass’s head, and Titania, the Queen of the Fairies, through the influence of a spell, takes him for a beautiful youth Adonis, and caresses him fondly.

29. *Alkali* (Arabic). A name for certain chemical substances, which have great affinity for acids, and combine with them, forming salts in which the peculiar qualities of both alkali and acid are generally destroyed.

are by no means insensible to the merits of this celebrated piece, to the severe dignity of the style, the graceful and pathetic solemnity of the opening speech, or the wild and barbaric melody which gives so striking an effect to the choral passages. But we think it, we confess, the least successful effort of the genius of Milton.

The *Comus* is framed on the model of the Italian Masque, as the *Samson* is framed on the model of the Greek tragedy. It is certainly the noblest performance of the kind which exists in any language. It is as far superior to the *Faithful Shepherdess* as the *Faithful Shepherdess* is to the *Aminta*, or the *Aminta* to the *Pastor Fido*. It was well for Milton that he had here no Euripides to mislead him. He understood and loved the literature of modern Italy. But he did not feel for it the same veneration which he entertained for the remains of Athenian and Roman poetry, consecrated by so many lofty and endearing recollections. The faults, moreover, of his Italian predecessors were of a kind to which his mind had a deadly antipathy. He could stoop to a plain style, sometimes even to a bald style ; but false brilliancy was his utter aversion. His muse had no objection to a russet attire ; but she turned with disgust from the finery of Guarini, as tawdry and as paltry as the rags of a chimney-sweeper on May-day. Whatever ornaments *she* wears are of massive gold, not only dazzling to the sight, but capable of standing the severest test of the crucible.

Milton attended in the *Comus* to the distinction which he neglected in the *Samson*. He made it what it ought to be—

⁷ 7. Masque, differed from the drama proper in being written to celebrate a special occasion, and in having music, scenery, and other embellishments then denied to the regular plays.

¹⁰ 10. *Faithful Shepherdess*. A pastoral drama written by the dramatist John Fletcher (1576-1625).

¹¹ 11. *Aminta*. An Italian poem by Tasso (1544-1595).

¹² 12. *Il Pastor Fido*. *The Faithful Swain*, also Italian, but the work of Guarini (1537-1612) mentioned below.

²³ 23. May-day. A general holiday among the lower classes in England.

²⁶ 26. Crucible. A chemist's melting pot, so called because formerly marked with a cross.

essentially lyrical, and dramatic only in semblance. He has not attempted a fruitless struggle against a defect inherent in the nature of that species of composition ; and he has therefore succeeded wherever success was not impossible. The speeches must be read as majestic soliloquies ; and he who so reads them will be enraptured with their eloquence, their sublimity, and their music. The interruptions of the dialogue, however, impose a constraint upon the writer, and break the illusion of the reader. The finest passages are those which are lyric in form as well as in spirit. "I should much com-¹⁰ mend," says the excellent Sir Henry Wotton, in a letter to Milton, "the tragical part, if the lyrical did not ravish me with a certain *dorique* delicacy in your songs and odes, whereunto I must plainly confess to you I have seen yet-nothing parallel in our language." The criticism was just. It is when¹¹ Milton escapes from the shackles of the dialogue, when he is discharged from the labor of uniting two incongruous styles, when he is at liberty to indulge his choral raptures without reserve, that he rises even above himself. Then, like his own good genius bursting from the earthly form and weeds of²⁰ *Thyrsis*, he stands forth in celestial freedom and beauty ; he seems to cry exultingly—

"Now my task is smoothly done
I can fly or I can run."

—*Comus*, 1012, 1013.

to skim the earth, to soar above the clouds, to bathe in the²⁵ Elysian dew of the rainbow, and to inhale the balmy smells

11. Sir Henry Wotton (1568-1639). A scholar and poet who had been ambassador to Venice in James I.'s reign. When Milton was living at Horton in Buckinghamshire, where he wrote the *Comus*, Wotton was provost (head) of Eton College, close by, and Milton submitted the poem to his criticism.

21. *Thyrsis*. In the *Comus* takes the dress of a shepherd, but is really a spirit in disguise.

26. *Elysian*. From Elysium, the Paradise of the Greeks. It means nothing more than delightful.

of nard and cassia, which the musky wings of the zephyr scatter through the cedared alleys of the Hesperides.

“ There eternal summer dwells.
And west winds, with musky wing,
About the cedared alleys fling
Nard and cassia's balmy smells;
Iris there with humid bow
Waters the odorous banks, that blow
Flowers of more mingled hue
Than her purpled scarf can show,
And drenches with Elysian dew
(List, mortals, if your ears be true)
Beds of hyacinths and roses,
Where young Adonis oft reposes,
Waxing well of his deep wound.”

—*Comus*, 988-1000.

There are several of the minor poems of Milton on which we would willingly make a few remarks. Still more willingly would we enter into a detailed examination of that admirable poem, the *Paradise Regained*, which, strangely enough, is scarcely ever mentioned except as an instance of the blindness of that parental affection which men of letters bear towards the offspring of their intellects. That Milton was mistaken in preferring this work, excellent as it is, to the *Paradise Lost*, we must readily admit. But we are sure that the superiority of the *Paradise Lost* to the *Paradise Regained* is not more decided than the superiority of the *Paradise Regained* to every poem which has since made its appearance. But our limits prevent us from discussing the point at length. We hasten on to that extraordinary production which the general suffrage of critics has placed in the highest class of human compositions.

The only poem of modern times which can be compared with the *Paradise Lost* is the *Divine Comedy*. The subject of Mil-

2. *Hesperides*. In Greek mythology, the three daughters of Hesperus, who guarded the golden apples of Juno.

33. *Divine Comedy* (*Divina Commedia*). The chief poem of Dante (1265-1321), the greatest of all the poets of Italy; a native of Florence in Tuscany. Hence Macaulay speaks of him below as the Florentine poet, and calls him the father of Tuscan literature.

ton in some points resembled that of Dante ; but he has treated it in a widely different manner. We cannot, we think, better illustrate our opinion respecting our own great poet than by contrasting him with the father of Tuscan literature.

The poetry of Milton differs from that of Dante as the hiero-⁵glyphics of Egypt differed from the picture-writing of Mexico. The images which Dante employs speak for themselves : they stand simply for what they are. Those of Milton have a signification which is often discernible only to the initiated. Their value depends less on what they directly represent than ¹⁰on what they remotely suggest. However strange, however grotesque may be the appearance which Dante undertakes to describe, he never shrinks from describing it. He gives us the shape, the color, the sound, the smell, the taste ; he counts the numbers ; he measures the size. His similes are the illustra-¹⁵tions of a traveler. Unlike those of other poets, and especially of Milton, they are introduced in a plain, business-like manner, not for the sake of any beauty in the objects from which they are drawn, not for the sake of any ornament which they may impart to the poem, but simply in order to make the ²⁰meaning of the writer as clear to the reader as it is to himself. The ruins of the precipice which led from the sixth to the seventh circle of hell were like those of the rock which fell into the Adige on the south of Trent. The cataract of Phlegethon was like that of Aqua Cheta at the monastery of St. Benedict. ²⁵

5. **Hieroglyphics** (literally sacred sculptures). Both those of Egypt and of Mexico are representations of natural or artificial objects on monuments, used to express language. But the essential difference between the two is that whereas the Egyptian pictures stand for letters, syllables, or words, the Mexican merely reproduce the objects intended to be specified. The Egyptian in fact are a kind of elaborate alphabet which rightly interpreted may be read into words ; the Mexican tell their story directly by depicting the things themselves. For example, the picture of an eagle on an Egyptian monument stands for the letter A ; and the picture of a goose for the letter S ; while on a Mexican monument the picture of a city or of a king stands for that city or king and nothing more. This is the distinction Macaulay has in view, but it is necessary to explain that even in the case of the Egyptian pictures, the original use was to represent ideas ; the alphabetic and grammatical application being a later development.

The place where the heretics were confined in burning tombs resembled the vast cemetery of Arles !

Now, let us compare with the exact details of Dante the dim intimations of Milton. We will cite a few examples. The English poet has never thought of taking the measure of Satan. He gives us merely a vague idea of vast bulk. In one passage, the fiend lies stretched out huge in length, floating many a rood, equal in size to the earth-born enemies of Jove, or to the sea-monster which the mariner mistakes for an island. When he addresses himself to battle against the guardian angels, he stands like Teneriffe or Atlas ; his stature reaches the sky. Contrast with these descriptions the lines in which Dante has described the gigantic specter of Nimrod. " His face seemed to me as long and as broad as the ball of St. Peter's at Rome, and his other limbs were in proportion ; so that the bank, which concealed him from the waist downwards, nevertheless showed so much of him that three tall Germans would in vain have attempted to reach to his hair." We are sensible that we do no justice to the admirable style of the Florentine poet. But Mr. Cary's translation is not at hand ; and our version, however rude, is sufficient to illustrate our meaning.

Once more, compare the lazaret-house in the eleventh book of the *Paradise Lost* with the last word of Malebolge in Dante. Milton avoids the loathsome details, and takes refuge in indistinct but solemn and tremendous imagery—Despair hurrying from couch to couch to mock the wretches with his attendance; Death shaking his dart over them, but, in spite of supplications, delaying to strike. What says Dante ? " There was such a moan there as there would be if all the sick who, between July and September, are in the hospitals of Valdichiana, and of the

2. It is not considered necessary to clear up all those allusions. The reader will feel the force of Macaulay's contrast, although not able to localize every individual place, and no annotation, apart from reading the poems themselves, would render everything clear.

22. **Lazar-house** (derived from the New Testament Lazarus). A public building for the reception of diseased persons. Also called a Lazaretto (Ital.).

Tuscan swamps, and of Sardinia, were in one pit together ; and such a stench was issuing forth as is wont to issue from decayed limbs."

We will not take upon ourselves the invidious office of settling precedence between two such writers. Each, in his own department, is incomparable ; and each, we may remark, has, wisely or fortunately, taken a subject adapted to exhibit his peculiar talent to the greatest advantage. The *Divine Comedy* is a personal narrative. Dante is the eye-witness and ear-witness of that which he relates. He is the very man who has heard the tormented spirits crying out for the second death, who has read the dusky characters on the portal within which there is no hope, who has hidden his face from the terrors of the Gorgon, who has fled from the hooks and the seething pitch of Barbariccia and Diaghignazzo. His own hands have grasped the shaggy sides of Lucifer. His own feet have climbed the mountain of expiation. His own brow has been marked by the purifying angel. The reader would throw aside such a tale in incredulous disgust unless it were told with the strongest air of veracity, with a sobriety even in its horrors, with the greatest precision and multiplicity in its details. The narrative of Milton in this respect differs from that of Dante, as the adventures of Amadis differ from those of Gulliver. The author of *Amadis* would have made his book ridiculous if he had introduced those minute particulars which give such a charm to the work of Swift—the nautical observations, the

14. **Gorgon.** There were three Gorgons with serpents in place of hair. Medusa was the chief, and so hideous that whoever set eyes on her face was immediately turned to stone.

23. **Amadis.** The hero of a romance in prose (Amadis of Gaul), originally written in Portuguese, in four books, but added to in the Spanish and French translations. He was a poet and a musician, a linguist and a gallant, a knight-errant and a king, the very model of chivalry.

23. **Gulliver.** Lemuel. The fictitious hero of Swift's famous travels—a bitter political and social satire under the form of a sailor's book of adventure in strange lands. It is in four parts: 1st part, the voyage to Lilliput pygmies; 2d, to Brobdingnag (giants); 3d, to Laputa (flying island); 4th, to the country of the Houyhnhnms (philosophizing horses).

affected delicacy about names, the official documents transcribed at full length, and all the unmeaning gossip and scandal of the court, springing out of nothing, and tending to nothing. We are not shocked at being told that a man, who
5 lived nobody knows when, saw many very strange sights ; and we can easily abandon ourselves to the illusion of the romance. But when Lemuel Gulliver, surgeon, now actually resident in Rotherhithe, tells us of pygmies, and giants, flying islands and philosophizing horses, nothing but such circumstantial
10 touches could produce for a single moment a deception on the imagination.

Of all the poets who have introduced into their works the agency of supernatural beings, Milton has succeeded best. Here Dante decidedly yields to him ; and as this is a point on
15 which many rash and ill-considered judgments have been pronounced, we feel inclined to dwell on it a little longer. The most fatal error which a poet can possibly commit in the management of his machinery, is that of attempting to philosophize too much. Milton has been often censured for ascribing to
20 spirits many functions of which spirits must be incapable. But these objections, though sanctioned by eminent names, originate, we venture to say, in profound ignorance of the art of poetry.

What is spirit ? What are our own minds, the portion of
25 spirit with which we are best acquainted ? We observe certain phenomena. We cannot explain them into material causes. We therefore infer that there exists something which is not material. But of this something we have no idea. We can define it only by negatives. We can reason about it only by
30 symbols. We use the word, but we have no image of the thing ; and the business of poetry is with images, and not with words. The poet uses words indeed ; but they are merely the instruments of his art, not its objects. They are the materials which he is to dispose in such a manner as to present a picture
35 to the mental eye. And if they are not so disposed, they are

no more entitled to be called poetry than a bale of canvas and a box of colors to be called a painting.

Logicians may reason about abstractions. But the great mass of mankind can never feel an interest in them. They must have images. The strong tendency of the multitude, in all ages and nations, to idolatry, can be explained on no other principle. The first inhabitants of Greece, there is every reason to believe, worshiped one invisible deity. But the necessity of having something more definite to adore produced, in a few centuries, the innumerable crowd of gods and goddesses. In like manner, the ancient Persians thought it impious to exhibit the Creator under a human form. Yet even these transferred to the sun the worship which, speculatively, they considered due only to the Supreme Mind. The history of the Jews is the record of a continued struggle between pure theism, supported by the most terrible sanctions, and the strangely fascinating desire of having some visible and tangible object of adoration. Perhaps none of the secondary causes which Gibbon has assigned for the rapidity with which Christianity spread over the world, while Judaism scarcely ever acquired a proselyte, operated more powerfully than this feeling. God, the uncreated, the incomprehensible, the invisible, attracted few worshipers. A philosopher might admire so noble a conception, but the crowd turned away in disgust from words which presented no image to their minds. It was before deity embodied in a human form—walking among men, partaking of their infirmities, leaning on their bosoms, weeping over their graves, slumbering in the manger, bleeding on the cross—that the prejudices of the Synagogue, and the doubts of the

19. Gibbon, Edward (1737–1794), the historian, who wrote *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

29. The *Synagogue* stands for the Jews; the *Academy* for the Platonic philosophers (Plato's lectures were delivered in the Academy, a garden in Athens planted by Academos); the *Portico* for the Stoics, disciples of the philosopher Zeno, who taught under a portico in Athens; the *fascies* of the *Lictor* for the highest authorities of Rome, before whom the Lictors carried the fascies or bundle of rods, clearing the way and enforcing marks of respect.

Academy, and the pride of the Portico, and the fasces of the Lictor, and the swords of thirty legions, were humbled in the dust! Soon after Christianity had achieved its triumph, the principle which had assisted it began to corrupt it. It became
 5 a new Paganism. Patron saints assumed the offices of household gods. St. George took the place of Mars; St. Elmo consoled the mariner for the loss of Castor and Pollux; the Virgin Mother and Cecilia succeeded to Venus and the Muses. The fascination of sex and loveliness was again joined to that
 10 of celestial dignity, and the homage of chivalry was blended with that of religion. Reformers have often made a stand against these feelings, but never with more than apparent and partial success. The men who demolished the images in cathedrals have not always been able to demolish those which
 15 were enshrined in their minds. It would not be difficult to show that in politics the same rule holds good. Doctrines, we are afraid, must generally be *embodied* before they can excite a strong public feeling. The multitude is more easily interested for the most unmeaning badge, or the most insignificant
 20 name, than for the most important principle.

From these considerations, we infer that no poet who should affect that metaphysical accuracy, for the want of which Milton has been blamed, would escape a disgraceful failure. Still, however, there was another extreme which, though far
 25 less dangerous, was also to be avoided. The imaginations of men are in a great measure under the control of their opinions. The most exquisite art of poetical coloring can produce no illusion, when it is employed to represent that which is at once perceived to be incongruous and absurd. Milton wrote
 30 in an age of philosophers and theologians. It was necessary,

6. **St. George.** The patron saint of England; **Mars**, the god of war.

6. **St. Elmo's Fire.** The electric light seen playing about the masts of ships in stormy weather. The Romans called it Castor and Pollux.

8. **St. Cecilia.** The patroness of music, regarded as the inventor of the organ.

8. **Venus.** The goddess of love.

8. **Muses.** The nine fabled goddesses of poetry, music, dancing, etc.

therefore, for him to abstain from giving such a shock to their understandings as might break the charm which it was his object to throw over their imaginations. This is the real explanation of the indistinctness and inconsistency with which he has often been reproached. Dr. Johnson acknowledges⁵ that it was absolutely necessary for him to clothe his spirits with material forms. "But," says he, "he should have secured the consistency of his system by keeping immateriality out of sight, and seducing the reader to drop it from his thoughts?" This is easily said; but what if he could not se-¹⁰ duce the reader to drop it from his thoughts? What if the contrary opinion had taken so full a possession of the minds of men as to leave no room even for the *half-belief* which poetry requires? Such we suspect to have been the case. It was impossible for the poet to adopt altogether the material¹⁵ or the immaterial system. He therefore took his stand on the debatable ground: he left the whole in ambiguity. He has doubtless, by so doing, laid himself open to the charge of inconsistency; but, though philosophically in the wrong, we cannot but believe that he was poetically in the right. This²⁰ task, which almost any other writer would have found impracticable, was easy to him. The peculiar art which he possessed of communicating his meaning circuitously, through a long succession of associated ideas, and of intimating more than he expressed, enabled him to disguise those incongruities which²⁵ he could not avoid.

Poetry which relates to the beings of another world ought to be at once mysterious and picturesque. That of Milton is so. That of Dante is picturesque indeed, beyond any that ever was written. Its effect approaches to that produced by the pencil³⁰ or the chisel; but it is picturesque to the exclusion of all mystery. This is a fault, indeed, on the right side, a fault inseparable from the plan of his poem, which, as we have already observed, rendered the utmost accuracy of description necessary. Still, it is a fault. His supernatural agents excite an³⁵

interest, but it is not the mysterious interest which is proper to supernatural agents. We feel that we could talk with his ghosts and demons, without any emotion of unearthly awe. We could, like Don Juan, ask them to supper, and eat heartily ⁵ in their company. Dante's angels are good men with wings. His devils are spiteful, ugly executioners. His dead men are merely living men in strange situations. The scene which passes between the poet and Facinata is justly celebrated. Still Facinata in the burning tomb is exactly what Facinata ¹⁰ would have been at an *auto da fe*. Nothing can be more touching than the first interview of Dante and Beatrice. Yet what is it but a lovely woman chiding, with sweet, austere composure, the lover for whose affection she is grateful, but whose vices she reprobates? The feelings which give the pas- ¹⁵ sage its charm would suit the streets of Florence as well as the summit of the Mount of Purgatory.

The Spirits of Milton are unlike those of almost all other writers. His Fiends, in particular, are wonderful creations. They are not metaphysical abstractions. They are not wicked ²⁰ men. They are not ugly beasts. They have no horns, no tails, none of the fee-fa-fum of Tasso and Klopstock. They have just enough in common with human nature to be intelligible to human beings. Their characters are, like their forms, marked by a certain dim resemblance to those of men, but

4. **Don Juan.** The story referred to is not in Byron's Poem of *Don Juan*, but in Mozart's Opera of *Don Giovanni*. Don Juan asks a statue to a banquet, and to his amazement sees the statue place itself at the board.

10. **Auto da fe** (Portuguese—an act of Faith), a day set apart by the Inquisition for the examination of "heretics."

11. **Beatrice.** Dante, when a boy of nine, saw at a family party Beatrice Portinari, then eight years old, and a love sprang up in his heart that became the poetical inspiration of his life. The *Divine Comedy* depicts a vision in which the poet is conducted through Hell, Purgatory, and the several heavens, by first Virgil, then Beatrice, and lastly St. Bernard. It is to this meeting of Beatrice and Dante in the other world that Macaulay refers.

21. **Tasso** (1544–1595), an Italian Epic poet, his great Epic being *Gerusalemme Liberata* (Jerusalem delivered); **Klopstock** (1724–1803), a German poet who wrote on religious subjects,

exaggerated to gigantic dimensions, and veiled in mysterious gloom.

Perhaps the gods and demons of Æschylus may best bear a comparison with the angels and devils of Milton. The style of the Athenian had, as we have remarked, something of the 5 vagueness and tenor of the Oriental character; and the same peculiarity may be traced in his mythology. It has nothing of the amenity and elegance which we generally find in the superstitions of Greece. All is rugged, barbaric, and colossal. His legends seem to harmonize less with the fragrant groves 10 and graceful porticos in which his countrymen paid their vows to the god of light and goddess of desire, than with those huge and grotesque labyrinths of eternal granite, in which Egypt enshrined her mystic Osiris, or in which Hindustan still bows down to her seven-headed idols. His favorite gods are those 15 of the elder generations—the sons of heaven and earth, compared with whom Jupiter himself was a stripling and an upstart—the gigantic Titans and the inexorable Furies. Foremost among his creations of this class stands Prometheus, half fiend, half redeemer, the friend of man, the sullen and im- 20 placable enemy of heaven. He bears undoubtedly a considerable resemblance to the Satan of Milton. In both we find the same impatience of control, the same ferocity, the same unconquerable pride. In both characters also are mingled, though in very different proportions, some kind and generous 25 feelings. Prometheus, however, is hardly superhuman enough. He talks too much of his chains and his uneasy posture: he

3. Æschylus. See note, p. 30.

14. Osiris (in Egyptian mythology), judge of the dead, and potentate of the kingdom of the ghosts.

18. Titans (in classical mythology), the children of heaven and earth, a race of giants who warred against Jupiter.

18. Furies. The goddesses of fate, who led their victims into the most fearful calamities.

19. Prometheus. The hero of Æschylus' tragedy of that name. He made men of clay and stole fire from heaven to animate them, and for this he was chained by Jupiter to Mount Caucasus, where an eagle preyed daily on his liver.

is rather too much depressed and agitated. His resolution seems to depend on the knowledge which he possesses that he holds the fate of his torturer in his hands, and that the hour of his release will surely come. But Satan is a creature of
5 another sphere. The might of his intellectual nature is victorious over the extremity of pain. Amidst agonies which cannot be conceived without horror, he deliberates, resolves, and even exults. Against the sword of Michael, against the thunder of Jehovah, against the flaming lake, and the marl
10 burning with solid fire, against the prospect of an eternity of unintermittent misery, his spirit bears up unbroken, resting on its own innate energies, requiring no support from anything external, nor even from hope itself!

To return for a moment to the parallel which we have been
15 attempting to draw between Milton and Dante, we would add, that the poetry of these great men has in a considerable degree taken its character from their moral qualities. They are not egotists. They rarely obtrude their idiosyncrasies on their readers. They have nothing in common with those modern
20 beggars for fame, who extort a pittance from the compassion of the inexperienced, by exposing the nakedness and sores of their minds. Yet it would be difficult to name two writers whose works have been more completely, though undesignedly, colored by their personal feelings.

25 The character of Milton was peculiarly distinguished by loftiness of thought; that of Dante by intensity of feeling. In every line of the *Divine Comedy* we discern the asperity which is produced by pride struggling with misery. There is perhaps no work in the world so deeply and uniformly sorrowful.
30 The melancholy of Dante was no fantastic caprice. It was not, as far as at this distance of time can be judged, the effect of external circumstances. It was from within. Neither love nor glory, neither the conflicts of earth, nor the hope of heaven, could dispel it. It turned every consolation
35 and every pleasure into its own nature. It resembled that

noxious Sardinian soil of which the intense bitterness is said to have been perceptible, even in its honey. His mind was, in the noble language of the Hebrew poet, "a land of darkness, as darkness itself, and where the light was as darkness!" The gloom of his character discolours all the passions of men and all the face of nature, and tinges with its own livid hue the flowers of Paradise and the glories of the eternal throne! All the portraits of him are singularly characteristic. No person can look on the features, noble even to ruggedness, the dark furrows of the cheek, the haggard and woful stare of the eye, the sullen and contemptuous curve of the lip, and doubt that they belonged to a man too proud and too sensitive to be happy.

Milton was, like Dante, a statesman and a lover—and, like Dante, he had been unfortunate in ambition and in love. He had survived his health and his sight, the comforts of his home, and the prosperity of his party. Of the great men by whom he had been distinguished at his entrance into life, some had been taken away from the evil to come; some had carried into foreign climates their unconquerable hatred of oppression; some were pining in dungeons; and some had poured forth their blood on scaffolds. Venal and licentious scribblers, with just sufficient talent to clothe the thoughts of a pander in the style of a bellman, were now the favorite writers of the sovereign and of the public. It was a loathsome herd—which could be compared to nothing so fitly as to the rabble of Comus, grotesque monsters, half bestial, half human, dropping with wine, bloated with gluttony, and reeling in obscene dances. Amidst these his muse was placed, like the chaste lady of the masque, lofty, spotless, and serene—to be chattered at, and pointed at, and grinned at, by the whole rabble of satyrs and goblins. If ever despondency and asperity could be excused in any man, it might have been excused in Milton. But the strength of his mind overcame every calamity. Neither blindness, nor gout, nor age, nor penury, nor domestic afflictions, nor politi-

cal disappointments, nor abuse, nor proscription, nor neglect, had power to disturb his sedate and majestic patience. His spirits do not seem to have been high, but they were singularly equable. His temper was serious, perhaps stern ; but it was a
 5 temper which no sufferings could render sullen or fretful. Such as it was, when, on the eve of great events, he returned from his travels, in the prime of health and manly beauty, loaded with literary distinctions, and glowing with patriotic hopes, such it continued to be—when, after having experienced
 10 every calamity which is incident to our nature, old, poor, sightless, and disgraced, he retired to his hovel to die !

Hence it was, that, though he wrote the *Paradise Lost* at a time of life when images of beauty and tenderness are in general beginning to fade, even from those minds in which they
 15 have not been effaced by anxiety and disappointment, he adorned it with all that is most lovely and delightful in the physical and in the moral world. Neither Theocritus nor Ariosto had a finer or a more healthful sense of the pleasantness of external objects, or loved better to luxuriate amidst
 20 sunbeams and flowers, the songs of nightingales, the juice of summer fruits, and the coolness of shady fountains. His conception of love unites all the voluptuousness of the Oriental harem, and all the gallantry of the chivalric tournament, with all the pure and quiet affection of an English fireside. His
 25 poetry reminds us of the miracles of Alpine scenery. Nooks and dells, beautiful as fairy-land, are embosomed in its most rugged and gigantic elevations. The roses and myrtles bloom unchilled on the verge of the avalanche.

Traces indeed of the peculiar character of Milton may be
 30 found in all his works ; but it is most strongly displayed in the sonnets. Those remarkable poems have been undervalued by critics who have not understood their nature. They have no

17. **Theocritus.** One of the great names in pastoral poetry. He wrote in Greek, and flourished in the third century before Christ.

18. **Ariosto** (1474–1533), an Italian poet, who wrote a high epic, *Orlando Furioso*.

epigrammatic point. There is none of the ingenuity of Filicaja in the thought, none of the hard and brilliant enamel of Petrarch in the style. They are simple but majestic records of the feelings of the poet ; as little tricked out for the public eye as his diary would have been. A victory, an expected attack upon the city, a momentary fit of depression or exultation, a jest thrown out against one of his books, a dream which for a short time restored to him that beautiful face over which the grave had closed forever, led him to musings which, without effort, shaped themselves into verse. The unity of sentiment and severity of style which characterize these little pieces remind us of the Greek Anthology, or perhaps still more of the Collects, of the English Liturgy : the noble poem on the Massacres of Piedmont is strictly a collect in verse.

The sonnets are more or less striking, according as the occasions which gave birth to them are more or less interesting. But they are, almost without exception, dignified by a sobriety and greatness of mind to which we know not where to look for a parallel. It would indeed be scarcely safe to draw any decided inferences as to the character of a writer, from passages directly egotistical. But the qualities which we have ascribed to Milton, though perhaps most strongly marked in those parts of his works which treat of his personal feelings, are distinguishable in every page, and impart to all his writings, prose and poetry, English, Latin, and Italian, a strong family likeness.

His public conduct was such as was to be expected from a man of a spirit so high, and an intellect so powerful. He lived at one of the most memorable eras in the history of mankind ; at the very crisis of the great conflict between

1. Filicaja (1642-1707), also an Italian poet, but lyrical.

3. Petrarch (1304-1374), another Italian poet.

12. Anthology. Collection or selection of flowers of literature.

13. Collects. Short comprehensive prayers.

13. Liturgy. Formulary of public devotions

Oromasdes and Arimanes—liberty and despotism, reason and prejudice. That great battle was fought for no single generation, for no single land. The destinies of the human race were staked on the same cast with the freedom of the English people. Then were first proclaimed those mighty principles which have since worked their way into the depths of the American forests, which have roused Greece from the slavery and degradation of two thousand years, and which, from one end of Europe to the other, have kindled an unquenchable fire in the hearts of the oppressed, and loosed the knees of the oppressors with a strange and unwonted fear! Of those principles, then struggling for their infant existence, Milton was the most devoted and eloquent literary champion. We need not say how much we admire his public conduct. But we cannot disguise from ourselves that a large portion of his countrymen still think it unjustifiable. The civil war, indeed, has been more discussed, and is less understood, than any event in English history. The Roundheads labored under the disadvantage of which the lion in the fable complained so bitterly. Though they were the conquerors, their enemies were the painters. As a body, they had done their utmost to decry and ruin literature; and literature was even with them, as, in the long-run, it always is with its enemies. The best book on their side of the question is the charming *Memoir of Mrs. Hutchinson*. May's *History of the Parliament* is

1. Oromasdes, the good genius, and Arimanes, the evil demon of the Persians.

18. Roundheads. The Puritans, so called because they wore their hair short, while the Royalists wore long hair covering their shoulders.

20. The fable referred to is as follows: A man and a lion traveled together through the forest. They soon began to boast of their respective superiority to each other in strength and prowess. As they were disputing they passed a statue, carved in stone, which represented a lion strangled by a man. The traveler pointed to it and said: "See there! how strong we are, and how we prevail over even the king of beasts." The lion replied: "This statue was made by one of you men. If the lions knew how to erect statues, you would see the man placed under the paw of the lion."

25. Mrs. Hutchinson (1620-1659). Wrote a memoir of her husband, Colonel Hutchinson, the Governor of Nottingham in the civil war. The book was not published till 1806.

25. May's *History of the Parliament*. Printed in 1647, and therefore

good; but it breaks off at the most interesting crisis of the struggle. The performance of Ludlow is very foolish and violent; and most of the later writers who have espoused the same cause—Oldmixon, for instance, and Catherine Macaulay have, to say the least, been more distinguished by zeal than either by candor or by skill. On the other side are the most authoritative and the most popular historical works in our language, that of Clarendon, and that of Hume. The former is not only ably written and full of valuable information, but has also an air of dignity and sincerity which makes even the 10 prejudices and errors with which it abounds respectable. Hume, from whose fascinating narrative the great mass of the reading public are still contented to take their opinions, hated religion so much that he hated liberty for having been allied with religion—and has pleaded the cause of tyranny with the 15 dexterity of an advocate, while affecting the impartiality of a judge.

The public conduct of Milton must be approved or condemned, according as the resistance of the people to Charles I. shall appear to be justifiable or criminal. We shall therefore 20 make no apology for dedicating a few pages to the discussion of that interesting and most important question. We shall not argue it on general grounds; we shall not recur to those primary principles from which the claim of any government to the obedience of its subjects is to be deduced; it is a van- 25 tage-ground to which we are entitled; but we will relinquish

covering only a part of the ground. May, who was secretary to the Parliament, died in 1650.

2. Ludlow, General. Wrote *Memoirs of Cromwell*. With Macaulay's judgment compare Carlyle's—"That solid but wooden head of his."

4. Oldmixon, John (1673-1742). Wrote a *History of England* (1730-1739).

4. Mrs. Catherine Macaulay (1733-1791). Her *History* covered the period from the accession of James I. to the elevation of the house of Hanover.

8. Clarendon, Earl (1608-1674). Wrote the *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England*.

8. Hume, David (1711-1776). More famous as a philosopher than as a historian. H. wrote the *History of England*.

19. The student should read in his *English History* a history of the Great Rebellion.

it. We are, on this point, so confident of superiority that we have no objection to imitate the ostentatious generosity of those ancient knights who vowed to joust without helmet or shield against all enemies, and to give their antagonists the advantage of sun and wind. We will take the naked constitutional question. We confidently affirm that every reason which can be urged in favor of the Revolution of 1688 may be urged with at least equal force in favor of what is called the Great Rebellion.

10 In one respect only, we think, can the warmest admirers of Charles venture to say that he was a better sovereign than his son. He was not, in name and profession, a papist; we say in name and profession—because both Charles himself and his miserable creature Land, while they abjured the innocent
15 badges of popery, retained all its worst vices, a complete subjection of reason to authority, a weak preference of form to substance, a childish passion for mummeries, an idolatrous veneration for a priestly character, and, above all, a stupid and ferocious intolerance. This, however, we waive. We
20 will concede that Charles was a good Protestant; but we say that his Protestantism does not make the slightest distinction between his case and that of James.

The principles of the Revolution have often been grossly misrepresented. There is a certain class of men who, while
25 they profess to hold in reverence the great names and great actions of former times, never look at them for any other purpose than in order to find in them some excuse for existing abuses. In every venerable precedent, they pass by what is essential, and take only what is accidental: they keep out of
30 sight what is beneficial, and hold up to public imitation all that is defective. If, in any part of any great example, there be anything unsound, these flesh-flies detect it with an unerring instinct, and dart upon it with a ravenous delight. They

14. **Laud** (1573-1645), Archbishop of Canterbury. The great enemy of Puritanism and the champion of Ritualism.

cannot always prevent the advocates of a good measure from compassing their end ; but they feel, with their prototype, that

“ Their labors must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still to find means of evil.”

5

— *Paradise Lost*, i. 164, 165.

To the blessings which England has derived from the Revolution, these people are utterly insensible. The expulsion of a tyrant, the solemn recognition of popular rights, liberty, security, toleration, all go for nothing with them. One sect¹⁰ there was which, from unfortunate temporary causes, it was thought necessary to keep under close restraint. One part of the empire there was, so unhappily circumstanced that at that time its misery was necessary to our happiness, and its slavery to our freedom ! These are the parts of the Revolu-¹⁵ tion which the politicians of whom we speak love to contemplate, and which seem to them, not indeed to vindicate, but in some degree to palliate the good which it has produced. Talk to them of Naples, of Spain, or of South America ! they stand forth, zealots for the doctrine of divine right—which²⁰ has now come back to us, like a thief from transportation, under the *alias* of legitimacy. But mention the miseries of Ireland ! Then William is a hero. Then Somers and Shrewsbury are great men. Then the Revolution is a glorious era ! The very same persons who, in this country, never omit an²⁵ opportunity of reviving every wretched Jacobite slander respecting the Whigs of that period, have no sooner crossed St. George's Channel than they begin to fill their bumpers to the

10. One Sect. The Roman Catholics.

12. One part of the empire. Ireland.

23. Somers and Shrewsbury. High officials of state in William III.'s reign—Somers, Lord Chancellor; and Shrewsbury, Secretary of State.

26. Jacobite. An epithet given the adherents of James II., his son and grandson

27. Whigs. A political party in England of the reign of Charles I. and II. about the middle of the seventeenth century. Those who supported the king were called Tories, and the advocates of popular rights and parliamentary power over the crown were called Whigs.

28. Crossed St. George's Channel. That is, “gone over to Ireland.”

glorious and immortal memory. They may truly boast that they look not at men but at measures. So that evil be done, they care not who does it—the arbitrary Charles, or the liberal William, Ferdinand the Catholic, or Frederick the Protestant ! On such occasions their deadliest opponents may reckon upon their candid construction. The bold assertions of these people have of late impressed a large portion of the public with an opinion that James II. was expelled simply because he was a Catholic, and that the Revolution was essentially a Protestant Revolution.

But this certainly was *not* the case. Nor can any person who has acquired more knowledge of the history of those times than is to be found in Goldsmith's *Abridgment*, believe that, if James had held his own religious opinions without wishing to make proselytes, or if, wishing even to make proselytes, he had contented himself with exerting only his constitutional influence for that purpose, the Prince of Orange would ever have been invited over. Our ancestors, we suppose, knew their own meaning. And, if we may believe them, their hostility was primarily, not to Popery, but to *Tyranny*. They did not drive out a tyrant because he was a Catholic ; but they excluded Catholics from the crown, because they thought them likely to be tyrants. The ground on which they, in their famous resolution, declared the throne vacant, was this, “that James had broken the fundamental laws of the kingdom.” Every man, therefore, who approves of the Revolution of 1688, must hold that *the breach of fundamental laws on the part of the sovereign* justifies resistance. The question then is this : Had Charles I. broken the fundamental laws of England ?

4. **Ferdinand the Catholic** (1452–1516). Ferdinand V. of Spain, during whose reign, and that of his wife Isabella, the Inquisition was established.

5. **Frederick the Protestant** (1596–1632). Frederick V., Elector Palatine, head of the Protestant princes of Germany, and son-in-law of King James I. of England.

13. **Goldsmith, Oliver** (1728–1774). Famous for his poems the *Deserted Village* and the *Traveller*, as well as for his novel the *Vicar of Wakefield* ; tried his hand also, though without much success, at compiling a History of England.

No person can answer in the negative, unless he refuses credit, not merely to all the accusations brought against Charles by his opponents, but to the narratives of the warmest royalists, and to the confessions of the king himself. If there be any truth in *any* historian of *any* party who has related the events of that reign, the conduct of Charles, from his accession to the meeting of the Long Parliament, had been a continued course of oppression and treachery. Let those who applaud the Revolution and condemn the Rebellion, mention one act of James II. to which a parallel is not to be found in the history of his father. Let them lay their fingers on a single article in the declaration of right, presented by the two houses to William and Mary, which Charles is not acknowledged to have violated. He had, according to the testimony of his own friends, usurped the functions of the legislature, raised taxes without the consent of Parliament, and quartered troops on the people in the most illegal and vexatious manner. Not a single session of parliament had passed without some unconstitutional attack on the freedom of debate. The right of petition was grossly violated. Arbitrary judgments, exorbitant fines, and unwarranted imprisonments, were grievances of daily and hourly occurrence. If these things do not justify resistance, the Revolution was treason; if they do, the Great Rebellion was laudable.

But, it is said, why not adopt milder measures? Why, after the king had consented to so many reforms, and renounced so many oppressive prerogatives, did the Parliament continue to rise in their demands at the risk of civil war? The ship-money

7. **The Long Parliament.** Charles came to the throne in 1635. The Long Parliament met in 1640, and, though temporarily suspended by Cromwell in 1653; it was recalled after Cromwell's death, and not finally dissolved till 1660: hence its name.

12. **The Declaration of Right.** A document asserting the ancient rights and liberties of England. On the assurance that these would be preserved by William, Parliament offered the crown to him and his wife.

28. **Ship-money.** One of Charles I.'s devices for raising money. He extended the tax formerly levied on maritime counties to every shire in the kingdom. It was John Hampden who first made a stand against this grievance.

had been given up. The Star-chamber had been abolished. Provision had been made for the frequent convocation and secure deliberation of Parliaments. Why not pursue an end confessedly good, by peaceable and regular means? We recur again to the analogy of the Revolution. Why was James driven from the throne? Why was he not retained upon conditions? He, too, had offered to call a free Parliament, and to submit to its decision all the matters in dispute. Yet we praise our forefathers, who preferred a
 10 revolution, a disputed succession, a dynasty of strangers, twenty years of foreign and intestine war, a standing army, and a national debt, to the rule, however restricted, of a tried and proved tyrant. The Long Parliament acted on the same principle, and is entitled to the same praise. They could
 15 not trust the king. He had, no doubt, passed salutary laws. But what assurance had they that he would not break them? He had renounced oppressive prerogatives. But where was the security that he would not resume them? They had to deal with a man whom no tie could bind, a man who made
 20 and broke promises with equal facility, a man whose honor had been a hundred times pawned—and never redeemed.

Here, indeed, the Long Parliament stands on still stronger ground than the Convention of 1688. No action of James can be compared, for wickedness and impudence, to the
 25 conduct of Charles with respect to the Petition of Right. The Lords and Commons present him with a bill in which the constitutional limits of his power are marked out. He hesitates; he evades; at last he bargains to give his assent for five subsidies. The bill receives his solemn assent. The sub-

1. **Star-Chamber.** So called because it sat in a room known by that name. It was a court of members of the privy council, together with two chief justices, who by degrees usurped a power of punishing anything that could be called contempt for the king's authority. It finally became almost inquisitorial in its character.

25. **Petition of Right** (1628). A bill condemning Charles' illegal practices, arbitrary taxes, and imprisonment, forced billeting of soldiers upon the people, and exercise of martial law.

sidies are voted. But no sooner is the tyrant relieved, than he returns at once to all the arbitrary measures which he had bound himself to abandon, and violates all the clauses of the very act which he had been paid to pass.

For more than ten years the people had seen the rights, 5 which were theirs by a double claim, by immemorial inheritance and by recent purchase, infringed by the perfidious king who had recognized them. At length circumstances compelled Charles to summon another Parliament: another chance was given them for liberty. Were they to throw it away as they 10 had thrown away the former? Were they again to be cozened by *le roi le veut*? Were they again to advance their money on pledges which had been forfeited over and over again? Were they to lay a second petition of right at the foot of the throne, to grant another lavish aid in exchange for another unmean- 15 ing ceremony, and then to take their departure, till, after ten years more of fraud and oppression, their prince should again require a supply, and again repay it with a perjury? They were compelled to choose whether they would *trust* a tyrant or *conquer* him. We think that they chose wisely and nobly. 20

The advocates of Charles, like the advocates of other malefactors against whom overwhelming evidence is produced, generally decline all controversy about the facts, and content themselves with calling testimony to character. He had so many private virtues! And had James II. no private virtues? 25 Was even Oliver Cromwell, his bitterest enemies themselves being judges, destitute of private virtues? And what, after all, are the virtues ascribed to Charles? A religious zeal, not more sincere than that of his son, and fully as weak and narrow-minded, and a few of the ordinary household decencies 30 which half the tombstones in England claim for those who lie beneath them. A good father! A good husband! Ample

12. *Le roi le veut*. The king wishes it. The phrase by which is announced the royal assent to bills in Parliament. It is a survival from the time when French was the language of the court and of public business, particularly in the 13th century.

apologies indeed for fifteen years of persecution, tyranny, and falsehood.

We charge him with having broken his coronation oath—and we are told that he kept his marriage vow ! We accuse him of having given up his people to the merciless inflictions of the most hot-headed and hard-hearted of prelates ; and the defense is, that he took his little son on his knee and kissed him ! We censure him for having violated the articles of the Petition of Right, after having, for good and valuable consideration, promised to observe them ; and we are informed, that he was accustomed to hear prayers at six o'clock in the morning ! It is to such considerations as these, together with his Vandyke dress, his handsome face, and his peaked beard, that he owes, we verily believe, most of his popularity with the present generation.

For ourselves, we own that we do not understand the common phrase, a good man but a bad king. We can as easily conceive a good man and an unnatural father, or a good man and a treacherous friend. We cannot, in estimating the character of an individual, leave out of our consideration his conduct in the most important of all human relations. And if, in that relation, we find him to have been selfish, cruel, and deceitful, we shall take the liberty to call him a bad man, in spite of all his temperance at table, and all his regularity at chapel. We cannot refrain from adding a few words respecting a topic on which the defenders of Charles are fond of dwelling. If, they say, he governed his people ill, he at least governed them after the example of his predecessors. If he violated their privileges, it was because those privileges had not been accurately defined. No act of oppression has ever been imputed to him, which has not a parallel in the annals of the Tudors. This point Hume has labored, with an art which is as

12. **Vandyke** (1599–1641). A great portrait-painter, who, though a native of Flanders, spent the latter part of his life in England, and has left paintings of all the chief historical characters of Charles' court,

discreditable in a historical work as it would be admirable in a forensic address. The answer is short, clear, and decisive. Charles had assented to the Petition of Right. *He had renounced* the oppressive powers said to have been exercised by his predecessors, and he had renounced them for money. He was not entitled to set up his antiquated claims against his own recent release.

These arguments are so obvious that it may seem superfluous to dwell upon them. But those who have observed how much the events of that time are misrepresented and misunderstood will not blame us for stating the case simply. It is a case of which the simplest statement is the strongest.

The enemies of the Parliament, indeed, rarely choose to take issue on the great points of the question. They content themselves with exposing some of the crimes and follies to which public commotions necessarily give birth. They bewail the unmerited fate of Strafford. They execrate the lawless violence of the army. They laugh at the scriptural names of the preachers. Major-generals fleecing their districts; soldiers revelling on the spoils of a ruined peasantry; upstarts, enriched by the public plunder, taking possession of the hospitable firesides and hereditary trees of the old gentry; boys smashing the beautiful windows of cathedrals; Quakers riding naked through the market-place; fifth-monarchy-men shouting for King Jesus; agitators lecturing from the tops of tubs on the fate of Agag—all these, they tell us, were the offspring of the Great Rebellion.

Be it so. We are not careful to answer in this matter. These charges, were they infinitely more important, would not

17. Strafford, Earl of. One of Charles's instruments in the introduction of arbitrary and tyrannical government. He was beheaded in 1641, and with him died the system of government he had endeavored to establish.

24. Fifth-monarchy-men. One of the numerous sects that sprang out of Puritanism. They believed themselves called on to prepare the way for the reign on earth of Christ's saints. Having read of the "Four Great Monarchies," Assyrian, Persian, Greek, and Roman, they reckoned their expected kingdom as the "*Fifth Monarchy*."

alter our opinion of an event which alone has made us to differ from the slaves who crouch beneath the scepters of Brandenburg and Braganza. Many evils, no doubt, *were* produced by the civil war. They were the price of our liberty. Has the acquisition been worth the sacrifice? It is the nature of the devil of tyranny to tear and rend the body which he leaves. Are the miseries of continued possession less horrible than the struggles of the tremendous exorcism?

If it were possible that a people brought up under an intolerant and arbitrary system could subvert that system without acts of cruelty and folly, half the objections to despotic power would be removed. We should, in that case, be compelled to acknowledge that it at least produces no pernicious effects on the intellectual and moral character of a people. We deplore the outrages which accompany revolutions. But the more violent the outrages, the more assured we feel that *a revolution was necessary*. The violence of those outrages will always be proportioned to the ferocity and ignorance of the people; and the ferocity and ignorance of the people will be proportioned to the oppression and degradation under which they have been accustomed to live. Thus it was in our civil war. The rulers in church and state reaped only that which they had sown. They had prohibited free discussion; they had done their best to keep the people unacquainted with their duties and their rights. The retribution was just and natural. If they suffered from popular ignorance, it was because they had themselves taken away the key of knowledge. If they were assailed with blind fury, it was because they had exacted an equally blind submission.

It is the character of such revolutions that we always see the worst of them at first. Till men have been for some time

2. **Brandenburgh.** The Elector of Brandenburgh (a province of Prussia) became King of Prussia (Frederick I., father of Frederick the Great) in 1701.

3. **Braganza.** A city of Portugal which gives its name to the house of Braganza, the present ruling dynasty in Portugal.

free, they know not how to use their freedom. The natives of wine countries are always sober. In climates where wine is a rarity, intemperance abounds. A newly liberated people may be compared to a northern army encamped on the Rhine or the Xeres. It is said that, when soldiers in such a situation first find themselves able to indulge without restraint in such a rare and expensive luxury, nothing is to be seen but intoxication. Soon, however, plenty teaches discretion ; and after wine has been for a few months their daily fare, they become more temperate than they had ever been in their own country. In the same manner, the final and permanent fruits of liberty are wisdom, moderation, and mercy. Its immediate effects are often atrocious crimes, conflicting errors, skepticism on points the most clear, dogmatism on points the most mysterious. It is just at this crisis that its enemies love to exhibit it. They pull down the scaffolding from the half-finished edifice ; they point to the flying dust, the falling bricks, the comfortless rooms, the frightful irregularity of the whole appearance; and then ask in scorn where the promised splendor and comfort is to be found? If such miserable sophisms were to prevail, there would never be a good house or a good government in the world.

Ariosto tells a pretty story of a fairy who, by some mysterious law of her nature, was condemned to appear, at certain seasons, in the form of a foul and poisonous snake. Those who injured her during the period of her disguise were forever excluded from participation in the blessings which she bestowed. But to those who, in spite of her loathsome aspect, pitied and protected her, she afterwards revealed herself in the beautiful and celestial form which was natural to her, accompanied their steps, granted all their wishes, filled their

5. **Xeres.** A town of Andalusia (not a river) in Spain, the center of a district famous for its splendid vineyards. "Sherry" wine takes its name from this town.

23. **A pretty story.** In his great poem *Orlando Furioso*, canto 43.

houses with wealth, made them happy in love and victorious in war. Such a spirit is Liberty. At times she takes the form of a hateful reptile. She grovels, she hisses, she stings. But woe to those who in disgust shall venture to crush her! And
5 happy are those who, having dared to receive her in her degraded and frightful shape, shall at length be rewarded by her in the time of her beauty and her glory!

There is only one cure for the evils which newly acquired freedom produces—and that cure is *freedom*! When a pris-
10 oner first leaves his cell, he cannot bear the light of day—he is unable to discriminate colors or to recognize faces. But the remedy is, not to remand him into his dungeon, but to accustom him to the rays of the sun. The blaze of truth and liberty may at first dazzle and bewilder nations which have become half
15 blind in the house of bondage. But let them gaze on, and they will soon be able to bear it. In a few years men learn to reason. The extreme violence of opinions subsides. Hostile theories correct each other. The scattered elements of truth cease to conflict, and begin to coalesce. And at length a
20 system of justice and order is educed out of the chaos.

Many politicians of our time are in the habit of laying it down as a self-evident proposition that no people ought to be free till they are fit to use their freedom. The maxim is worthy of the fool in the old story, who resolved not to go
25 into the water till he had learned to swim! If men are to wait for liberty till they become wise and good in slavery, they may indeed wait forever.

Therefore it is that we decidedly approve of the conduct of Milton and the other wise and good men who, in spite of much
30 that was ridiculous and hateful in the conduct of their associates, stood firmly by the cause of public liberty. We are not aware that the poet has been charged with personal participation in any of the blamable excesses of that time. The favorite topic of his enemies is the line of conduct which he pursued
35 with regard to the execution of the king. Of that celebrated

proceeding we by no means approve. Still we must say, in justice to the many eminent persons who concurred in it, and in justice more particularly to the eminent person who defended it, that nothing can be more absurd than the imputations which, for the last hundred and sixty years, it has been the fashion to cast upon the regicides. We have throughout abstained from appealing to first principles. We will not appeal to them now. We recur again to the parallel case of the Revolution. What essential distinction can be drawn between the execution of the father and the deposition of the son? What constitutional maxim is there which applies to the former and not to the latter? The king can do no wrong. If so, James was as innocent as Charles could have been. The minister only ought to be responsible for the acts of the sovereign. If so, why not impeach Jeffreys and retain James? The person of a king is sacred. Was the person of James considered sacred at the Boyne? To discharge cannon against an army in which a king is known to be posted, is to approach pretty near to regicide. Charles too, it should always be remembered, was put to death by men who had been exasperated by the hostilities of several years, and who never had been bound to him by any other tie than that which was common to them with all their fellow-citizens. Those who drove James from his throne, who seduced his army, who alienated his friends, who first imprisoned him in his palace, and then turned him out of it, who broke in upon his various slumbers by imperious messages, who pursued him with fire and sword from one part of the empire to another, who hanged, drew, and quartered his adherents, and attainted his innocent heir,

15. **Jeffreys.** Chief justice in the reigns of Charles II. and James II., was noted for his brutal demeanor on the judgment-seat. He presided at what was called the "Bloody Assizes," and condemned 320 persons to death.

17. **Boyne.** A battle fought in 1690, in Ireland, between William III. and the exiled James II. assisted by the French.

29. **His innocent heir.** The first pretender (claiming to be James III.), who led the Rebellion of 1715.—**His nephew.** William, whose mother, Mary, was a sister of James II.—**His two daughters.** Mary II., wife and full cousin of William, and Anne, queen after William's death.

were his nephew and his two daughters ! When we reflect on all these things, we are at a loss to conceive how the same persons who, on the fifth of November, thank God for wonderfully conducting His servant, King William, and for making
 5 all opposition fall before him until he became our king and governor, can, on the thirtieth of January, contrive to be afraid that the blood of the royal martyr may be visited on themselves and their children.

We disapprove, we repeat, of the execution of Charles ; not
 10 because the constitution exempts the king from responsibility, for we know that all such maxims, however excellent, have their exceptions ; nor because we feel any peculiar interest in his character, for we think that his sentence describes him with perfect justice as “ a tyrant, a traitor, a murderer, and a
 15 public enen y ;” but because we are convinced that the measure was most injurious to the cause of freedom. He whom it removed was a captive and a hostage : his heir, to whom the allegiance of every royalist was instantly transferred, was at large. The Presbyterians could never have been perfectly
 20 reconciled to the father ; they had no such rooted enmity to the son. The great body of the people, also, contemplated that proceeding with feelings which, however unreasonable, no government could safely venture to outrage.

But, though we think the conduct of the regicides blamable,
 25 that of Milton appears to us in a very different light. The deed was done. It could not be undone. The evil was incurred ; and the object was to render it as small as possible. We censure the chiefs of the army for not yielding to the popular opinion ; but we cannot censure Milton for wishing to
 30 change that opinion. The very feeling which would have restrained us from committing the act would have led us, after it had been committed, to defend it against the raving of

3. **Fifth of November.** The day of William's landing at Torbay, in Devon, 1688.

6. **Thirtieth of January.** The day of the execution of Charles, 1649.

servility and superstition. For the sake of public liberty, we wish that the thing had not been done, while the people disapproved of it. But, for the sake of public liberty, we should also have wished the people to approve of it when it was done. If anything more were wanting to the justification of Milton, 5 the book of Salmasius would furnish it. That miserable performance is now with justice considered only as a beacon to word-catchers who wish to become statesmen. The celebrity of the man who refuted it, the "*Æneæ magni dextra*," gives it all its fame with the present generation. In that age the 10 state of things was different. It was not then fully understood how vast an interval separates the mere classical scholar from the political philosopher. Nor can it be doubted that a treatise which, bearing the name of so eminent a critic, attacked the fundamental principles of all free governments, 15 must, if suffered to remain unanswered, have produced a most pernicious effect on the public mind.

We wish to add a few words relative to another subject on which the enemies of Milton delight to dwell—his conduct during the administration of the Protector. That an enthu- 20 siastic votary of liberty should accept office under a military usurper seems, no doubt, at first sight, extraordinary. But all the circumstances in which the country was then placed were extraordinary. The ambition of Oliver was of no vulgar kind. He never seems to have coveted despotic power. He 25 at first fought sincerely and manfully for the Parliament, and never deserted it, till it had deserted its duty. If he dissolved it by force, it was not till he found that the few members who remained after so many deaths, secessions, and expulsions, were desirous to appropriate to themselves a power which they 30

6. Salmasius. A French scholar, who was deputed by Charles II. to write a defense of his father, Charles I. (*Defensio Regis*); Milton was selected by the Commonwealth leaders to answer this book, which he did in his *Defensio Populi*, a defense of the conduct of the people of England.

9. *Æneæ magni dextra* [cadis]. "Thouallest by the right hand of the great Æneas" (Virgil's *Æneid*, x. 830).

held only in trust, and to inflict upon England the curse of a Venetian oligarchy. But even when thus placed by violence at the head of affairs, he did not assume unlimited power. He gave the country a constitution far more perfect than any
 5 which had at that time been known in the world. He reformed the representative system in a manner that has extorted praise even from Lord Clarendon. For himself he demanded indeed the first place in the commonwealth; but with powers scarcely so great as those of a Dutch stadtholder,
 10 or an American President. He gave the Parliament a voice in the appointment of ministers, and left to it the whole legislative authority—not even reserving to himself a veto on its enactments. And he did not require that the chief magistracy should be hereditary in his family. Thus far, we think,
 15 if the circumstances of the time, and the opportunities which he had of aggrandizing himself, be fairly considered, he will not lose by comparison with Washington or Bolivar. Had his moderation been met by corresponding moderation, there is no reason to think that he would have overstepped the line which
 20 he had traced for himself. But when he found that his parliaments questioned the authority under which they met, and that he was in danger of being deprived of the restricted power which was absolutely necessary to his personal safety, then, it must be acknowledged, he adopted a more arbitrary
 25 policy.

Yet, though we believe that the intentions of Cromwell were at first honest; though we believe that he was driven from the noble course which he had marked out for himself, by the almost irresistible force of circumstances; though we admire,

2. **Oligarchy.**—A form of government which places the supreme power in the hands of a small number—a close aristocracy. The government of Venice, up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, was a typical example.

9. **Stadtholder.** The old name for the chief magistrate of Holland.

17. **Washington** (1732-1799). The first President of the United States of America.—**Bolivar** (1783-1842). Called the Washington of South America, in virtue of his rescuing it from the Spanish yoke.

in common with all men of all parties, the ability and energy of his splendid administration, we are not pleading for arbitrary and lawless power, even in his hands. We know that a good constitution is infinitely better than the best despot. But we suspect that, at the time of which we speak, the violence of religious and political enmities rendered a stable and happy settlement next to impossible. The choice lay, not between Cromwell and liberty, but between Cromwell and the Stuarts. That Milton chose well, no man can doubt who fairly compares the events of the Protectorate with those of the thirty years which succeeded it—the darkest and most disgraceful in the English annals. Cromwell was evidently laying, though in an irregular manner, the foundations of an admirable system. Never before had religious liberty and freedom of discussion been enjoyed in a greater degree. Never had the national honor been better upheld abroad, or the seat of justice better filled at home. And it was rarely that any opposition, which stopped short of open rebellion, provoked the resentment of the liberal and magnanimous usurper. The institutions which he had established, as set down in the Instrument of Government, and the Humble Petition and Advice, were excellent. His practice, it is true, too often departed from the theory of these institutions. But, had he lived a few years longer, it is probable that his institutions would have survived him, and that his arbitrary practice would have died with him. His power had not been consecrated by ancient prejudices. It was upheld only by his great personal qualities. Little, therefore, was to be dreaded from a second Protector, unless he were also a second Oliver Cromwell. The events which followed his decease are the most complete vindication of those who exerted themselves to uphold his authority. For his death dissolved the whole frame of society. The army rose against the Parliament, the different corps of the army against each other. Sect raved against sect. Party plotted against party. The Presbyterians, in their eagerness

to be revenged on the Independents, sacrificed their own liberty, and deserted all their old principles. Without casting one glance on the past, or requiring one stipulation for the future, they threw down their freedom at the feet of the most frivolous and heartless of tyrants.

Then came those days, never to be recalled without a blush—the days of servitude without loyalty, and sensuality without love, of dwarfish talents and gigantic vices, the paradise of cold hearts and narrow minds, the golden age of the coward, the bigot, and the slave. The king cringed to his rival that he might trample on his people, sunk into a viceroy of France, and pocketed, with complacent infamy, her degrading insults and her more degrading gold. The caresses of harlots, and the jests of buffoons, regulated the measures of a government which had just ability enough to deceive, and just religion enough to persecute. The principles of liberty were the scoff of every grinning courtier, and the Anathema Maranatha of every fawning dean. In every high place, worship was paid to Charles and James—Belial and Moloch; and England propitiated those obscene and cruel idols, with the blood of her best and bravest children. Crime succeeded to crime, and disgrace to disgrace, till the race, accursed of God and man, was a second time driven forth, to wander on the face of the earth, and to be a by-word and a shaking of the head to the nations.

Most of the remarks which we have hitherto made on the public character of Milton apply to him only as one of a large body. We shall proceed to notice some of the peculiarities which distinguished him from his contemporaries. And, for

17. *Anathema Maranatha*. *Anathema* is Greek for curse; *Maranatha*, Syriac for "our Lord cometh." The whole is a form of denunciation. Cf. I. Corinthians xvi. 22.

19. *Belial* (Heb.). The worthless or lawless one, i.e., the Devil.—*Moloch*. The god of the Ammonites, to whom, in sacrifice, children were made to pass through the fire. Nowadays the word is used to designate any influence that demands from us the sacrifice of what we hold most dear.

that purpose, it is necessary to take a short survey of the parties into which the political world was at that time divided. We must premise that our observations are intended to apply only to those who adhered, from a sincere preference, to one or to the other side. At a period of public commotion, every 5 faction, like an Oriental army, is attended by a crowd of camp-followers, a useless and heartless rabble, who prowl round its line of march in the hope of picking up something under its protection, but desert it in the day of battle, and often join to exterminate it after a defeat. England, at the 10 time of which we are treating, abounded with such fickle and selfish politicians, who transferred their support to every government as it rose ; who kissed the hand of the king in 1640, and spat in his face in 1649 ; who shouted with equal glee when Cromwell was inaugurated in Westminster Hall, and 15 when he was dug up to be hanged at Tyburn ; who dined on calves' heads or on broiled rumps, and cut down oak-branches or stuck them up, as circumstances altered, without the slightest shame or repugnance. These we leave out of the account. We take our estimate of parties from those who really deserved 20 to be called partisans.

We would speak first of the Puritans, the most remarkable body of men, perhaps, which the world has ever produced. The odious and ridiculous parts of their character lie on the surface. He that runs may read them ; nor have there been 25 wanting attentive and malicious observers to point them out. For many years after the Restoration, they were the theme of unmeasured invective and derision. They were exposed to the utmost licentiousness of the press and the stage, at the time when the press and stage were most licentious. They 30 were not men of letters ; they were as a body unpopular ; they could not defend themselves ; and the public would not take them under its protection. They were therefore abandoned, without reserve, to the tender mercies of the satirists and dramatists. The ostentatious simplicity of their dress, their 35

sour aspect, their nasal twang, their stiff posture, their long graces, their Hebrew names, the scriptural phrases, which they introduced on every occasion, their contempt of human learning, their detestation of polite amusements, were indeed
 5 fair game for the laughers. But it is not from the laughers alone that the philosophy of history is to be learned. And he who approaches this subject should carefully guard against the influence of that potent ridicule which has already misled so many excellent writers.

10 Those who roused the people to resistance—who directed their measures through a long series of eventful years—who formed, out of the most unpromising materials, the finest army that Europe had ever seen—who trampled down King, Church, and Aristocracy—who, in the short intervals of
 15 domestic sedition and rebellion, made the name of England terrible to every nation on the face of the earth, were no vulgar fanatics. Most of their absurdities were mere external
 • badges, like the signs of free-masonry, or the dresses of friars. We regret that these badges were not more attractive. We
 20 regret that a body, to whose courage and talents mankind has owed inestimable obligations, had not the lofty elegance which distinguished some of the adherents of Charles I., or the easy good-breeding for which the court of Charles II. was celebrated. But, if we must make our choice, we shall, like
 25 Bassanio in the play, turn from the specious caskets, which contain only the death's head and the fool's head, and fix our choice on the plain leaden chest which conceals the treasure.

The Puritans were men whose minds had derived a peculiar character from the daily contemplation of superior beings

25. **Bassanio.** In Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, one of the suitors for Portia's hand. In obedience to her father's will, there are displayed three caskets (gold, silver, and lead), one of which contains the lady's portrait, and whoever chooses this is to be the fortunate possessor of Portia. The Prince of Morocco and the Prince of Arragon, deceived by the specious exterior, choose the gold and the silver casket respectively, and find nothing therein but a death's head and a fool's head. Bassanio selects "the plain leaden chest which conceals the treasure."

and eternal interests. Not content with acknowledging, in general terms, an overruling Providence, they habitually ascribed every event to the Will of the Great Being, for whose power nothing was too vast, for whose inspection nothing was too minute. To know Him, to serve Him, to enjoy Him, was 5 with them the great end of existence. They rejected with contempt the ceremonious homage which other sects substituted for the pure worship of the soul. Instead of catching occasional glimpses of the Deity through an obscuring vale, they aspired to gaze full on the intolerable brightness, and to 10 commune with Him face to face. Hence originated their contempt for terrestrial distinctions. The difference between the greatest and meanest of mankind seemed to vanish, when compared with the boundless interval which separated the whole race from Him on whom their own eyes were con- 15 stantly fixed. They recognized no title to superiority but His favor; and, confident of that favor, they despised all the accomplishments and all the dignities of the world. If they were unacquainted with the works of philosophers and poets, they were deeply read in the oracles of God. If their 20 names were not found in the registers of heralds, they felt assured that they were recorded in the Book of Life. If their steps were not accompanied by a splendid train of menials, legions of ministering angels had charge over them. Their palaces were houses not made with hands; their diadems, 25 crowns of glory which shall never fade away! On the rich and the eloquent, on nobles and priests, they looked down with contempt: for they esteemed themselves rich in a more precious treasure, and eloquent in a more sublime language, nobles by the right of an earlier creation, and priests by the 30 imposition of a mightier hand. The very meanest of them was a being to whose fate a mysterious and terrible importance belonged—on whose slightest action the spirits of light and darkness looked with anxious interest, who had been destined, before heaven and earth were created, to enjoy a 35

felicity which should continue when heaven and earth should have passed away. Events which short-sighted politicians ascribed to earthly causes had been ordained on his account. For his sake empires had risen, and flourished, and decayed. 5 For his sake the Almighty had proclaimed His will by the pen of the evangelist, and the harp of the prophet. He had been wrested by no common deliverer from the grasp of no common foe. He had been ransomed by the fate of no vulgar agony, by the blood of no earthly sacrifice. It was for him 10 that the sun had been darkened, that the rocks had been rent, that the dead had arisen, that all nature had shuddered at the sufferings of her expiring God !

Thus the Puritan was made up of two different men, the one all self-abasement, penitence, gratitude, passions ; the 15 other proud, calm, inflexible, sagacious. He prostrated himself in the dust before his Maker ; but he set his foot on the neck of his king. In his devotional retirement, he prayed with convulsions, and groans, and tears. He was half-maddened by glorious or terrible illusions. He heard the lyres of 20 angels, or the tempting whispers of fiends. He caught a gleam of the beatific vision, or woke screaming from dreams of everlasting fire. Like Vane, he thought himself intrusted with the scepter of the millennial year. Like Fleetwood, he cried in the bitterness of his soul that God had hid His face from 25 him. But when he took his seat in the council, or girt on his sword for war, these tempestuous workings of the soul had left no perceptible trace behind them. People who saw nothing of the godly but their uncouth visages, and heard nothing from them but their groans and their whining hymns,

22. **Vane**, Sir Henry. A prominent politician on the Parliamentary side during the Civil War. He was one of the "Fifth Monarchy Men" and much given to extravagant religious speculations.

23. **Millennial Year**. Millennium means simply a thousand years, and designates a certain period in the history of the world, lasting for an indefinite space (vaguely 1000 years), during which the Kingdom of the Messiah will be visibly established on the earth.

24. **Fleetwood**. A General in the Parliamentary forces, and son-in-law of Oliver Cromwell.

might laugh at them. But those had little reason to laugh who encountered them in the hall of debate, or in the field of battle. These fanatics brought to civil and military affairs a coolness of judgment, and an immutability of purpose, which some writers have thought inconsistent with their religious zeal, but which were in fact the necessary effects of it. The intensity of their feelings on one subject made them tranquil on every other. One overpowering sentiment had subjected to itself pity and hatred, ambition and fear. Death had lost its terrors, and pleasure its charms. They had their smiles¹⁰ and their tears, their raptures and their sorrows, but not for the things of this world. Enthusiasm had made them Stoics, had cleared their minds from every vulgar passion and prejudice, and raised them above the influence of danger and corruption. It sometimes might lead them to pursue unwise¹⁵ ends, but never to choose unwise means. They went through the world like Sir Artegal's iron man Talus with his flail, crushing and trampling down oppressors, mingling with human beings, but having neither part nor lot in human infirmities; insensible to fatigue, to pleasure, and to pain; not²⁰ to be pierced by any weapon, not to be withstood by any barrier.

Such we believe to have been the character of the Puritans. We perceive the absurdity of their manners. We dislike the sullen gloom of their domestic habits. We acknowledge that²⁵ the tone of their minds was often injured by straining after things too high for mortal reach: and we know that, in spite of their hatred of popery, they too often fell into the worst vices of that bad system, intolerance and extravagant austerity;

12 Stoics (See note, p. 39). Some of their tenets were that a man ought to be free from all passions, to be unmoved either by joy or grief, and to esteem all things governed by unavoidable necessity.

17. Talus. Spenser in his *Fuërie Queene* makes Talus run continually round the island of Crete, chastening offenders with an iron flail. Sir Artegal is the hero of the Fifth Book, and impersonates Justice.

that they had their anchorites and their crusades, their Dunstons and their De Montforts, their Dominics and their Escobars. Yet, when all circumstances are taken into consideration, we do not hesitate to pronounce them a brave, a wise, and an honest, and a useful body.

The Puritans espoused the cause of civil liberty mainly because it was the cause of religion. There was another party, by no means numerous, but distinguished by learning and ability, which co-operated with them on very different principles. We speak of those whom Cromwell was accustomed to call the heathens, men who were, in the phraseology of that time, doubting Thomases or careless Gallios with regard to religious subjects, but passionate worshippers of freedom. Heated by the study of ancient literature, they set up their country as their idol, and proposed to themselves the heroes of Plutarch as their examples. They seem to have borne some

1. **Anchorite.** Greek, meaning one who retires from the world—a hermit.

1. **Crusades.** The name given to the religious wars carried on, in the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries, between the Christian nations of Europe and the Mohammedans of the East. The object of conflict was to wrest the Holy Land from the Saracens. The word is derived from *crux*, meaning cross—the symbol of the Christian religion.

1. **Dunstan, St.** A celebrated ecclesiastic in England (Archbishop of Canterbury) in the tenth century. Macaulay takes him as a type of the intolerant and austere mind. The chief purpose of his life was to subjugate the Anglo-Saxon Church to that of Rome, to extend and multiply ecclesiastical interests, and to enforce celibacy on all the clergy. He introduced a new order of monks (Benedictines) into Britain, with additional strictness of discipline.

2. **De Montfort (1150-1226).** Not the De Montfort of English history, the founder of our parliamentary representation, but his father, a French nobleman, who in the twelfth century was notorious for his terrible religious crusade against the Albigenses. These were a set of "heretics" in the south of France, who wished to renounce the authority of the Pope and the Romish Church.

2. **Dominic (1170-1221).** The founder of the Dominican or Black Friars. He was associated with De Montfort in his barbarous cruelties towards the Albigenses.

2. **Escobar (1589-1669).** A Spanish Jesuit, famous as a writer on the subject of casuistry (i.e., the branch of theology and morals which deals with delicate questions of conscience, duty, and justice). He was also noted for the austerity of his life, and the strictness with which he adhered to the rules of his order, and this is the aspect Macaulay has in view.

12. **Thomas.** John xx. 24.

12. **Gallio.** Gallio "cared for none of those things" (Acts xviii. 17).

16. **Plutarch.** Author of *Parallel Lives of Forty-six Greeks and Romans*, arranged in pairs, a Greek and a Roman together. His heroes

resemblance to the Brissotins of the French Revolution. But it is not very easy to draw the line of distinction between them and their devout associates, whose tone and manner they sometimes found it convenient to affect, and sometimes, it is probable, imperceptibly adopted. 5

We now come to the Royalists. We shall attempt to speak of them, as we have spoken of their antagonists, with perfect candor. We shall not charge upon a whole party the profligacy and baseness of the horse-boys, gamblers, and bravoës, whom the hope of license and plunder attracted from all the 10 dens of Whitefriars to the standard of Charles, and who disgraced their associates by excesses which, under the stricter discipline of the Parliamentary armies, were never tolerated. We will select a more favorable specimen. Thinking, as we do, that the cause of the king was the cause of bigotry 15 and tyranny, we yet cannot refrain from looking with complacency on the character of the honest old Cavaliers. We feel a national pride in comparing them with the instruments which the despots of other countries are compelled to employ, with the mutes who throng their ante-chambers, and the 20 Janissaries who mount guard at their gates. Our royalist countrymen were not heartless, dangling courtiers, bowing at every step, and simpering at every word. They were not mere machines for destruction dressed up in uniforms, caned into skill, intoxicated into valor, defending without love, 25 destroying without hatred. There was a freedom in their subserviency, a nobleness in their very degradation. The sentiment of individual independence was strong within

were Theseus and Romulus, Lycurgus and Numa, Alexander and Cæsar, Demosthenes and Cicero, etc.

1. **Brissotins.** A nickname given to the advocates of reform in the French Revolution, because they were led by Jean Pierre Brissot. The party was subsequently named Girondists.

11. **Whitefriars.** A part of London, so called from a monastery of White Friars which formerly stood in Water Lane.

17. **Cavaliers.** The court party in the time of Charles I., as distinguished from Roundheads, the adherents of Parliament.

21. **Janissaries.** The militia of the Turkish Empire. The word is a corruption of *Yengi-tscheri*—new corps.

them. They were indeed misled, but by no base or selfish motive. Compassion and romantic honor, the prejudices of childhood, and the venerable names of history, threw over them a spell potent as that of Duessa; and like the Red-Cross Knight, they thought that they were doing battle for an injured beauty, while they defended a false and loathsome sorceress. In truth, they scarcely entered at all into the merits of the political question. It was not for a treacherous king or an intolerant church that they fought; but for the old banner which had waved in so many battles over the heads of their fathers, and for the altars at which they had received the hands of their brides. Though nothing could be more erroneous than their political opinions, they possessed, in a far greater degree than their adversaries, those qualities which are the grace of private life. With many of the vices of the Round Table they had also many of its virtues—courtesy, generosity, veracity, tenderness and respect for women. They had far more both of profound and polite learning than the Puritans. Their manners were more engaging, their tempers more amiable, their tastes more elegant, and their households more cheerful.

Milton did not strictly belong to any of the classes which we have described. He was not a Puritan. He was not a free-thinker. He was not a Cavalier. In his character the noblest qualities of every party were combined in harmonious union. From the Parliament and from the court, from the conventicle and from the Gothic cloister, from the gloomy and sepulchral circles of the Roundheads, and from the Christmas

4. **Duessa.** In Spenser's *Faërie Queene* (Book I. 2-7) a foul witch, who assumes the disguise of Una, a distressed and lovely woman, to beguile her champion, the Red-Cross Knight, into the Palace of Pride.

16. **Round Table.** The legendary table of King Arthur and his knights.

27. **Gothic cloister.** Here it stands for a monastery or abbey—by a figure of contiguity. The cloister was an arcade round the open courts of monasteries and large churches. Gothic architecture was neither originated nor influenced by the Goths. The term was applied in contempt to the architecture of the middle ages, by the architects of the Renaissance or sixteenth century. To them it was clumsy, and fit only for Goths or barbarians.

revel of the hospitable Cavalier, his nature selected and drew to itself whatever was great and good, while it rejected all the base and pernicious ingredients by which those finer elements were defiled. Like the Puritans, he lived

"As ever in his great Task-master's eye." *

5

Like them, he kept his mind continually fixed on an Almighty Judge and an eternal reward. And hence he acquired their contempt of external circumstances, their fortitude, their tranquillity, their inflexible resolution. But not the coolest skeptic or the most profane scoffer was more perfectly free from the contagion of their frantic delusions, their savage manners, their ludicrous jargon, their scorn of science, and their aversion to pleasure. Hating tyranny with a perfect hatred, he had nevertheless all the estimable and ornamental qualities which were almost entirely monopolized by the party of the tyrant. There was none who had a stronger sense of the value of literature, a finer relish for every elegant amusement, or a more chivalrous delicacy of honor and love. Though his opinions were democratic, his tastes and his associations were such as harmonize best with monarchy and aristocracy. He was under the influence of all the feelings by which the gallant Cavaliers were misled. But of those feelings he was the master and not the slave. Like the hero of Homer, he enjoyed all the pleasures of fascination; but he was not fascinated. He listened to the song of the Sirens; but he glided by without being seduced to their fatal shore. He tasted the cup of Circe; but he bore about him a sure au-

* "All is, if I have grace to use it so,
As ever in my great taskmaster's eye."

—Milton's *Sonnet on his 23d Birthday*.

24. **The hero of Homer.** Ulysses, one of the heroes of the Trojan war, and the hero of Homer's *Odyssey*. The Sirens were maidens who sat on a promontory on the coast of Italy and sang, with bewitching sweetness, songs that allured the passing sailor to draw near only to meet with destruction. Ulysses, on the advice of Circe, stuffed the ears of his companions with wax and lashed himself to a mast until he had sailed out of hearing of the fatal songs.

27. **Circe.** A fabulous sorceress, who by her drugs changed human beings into wolves and lions. She changed twenty-two of Ulysses' compan-

tidote against the effects of its bewitching sweetness. The illusions which captivated his imagination never impaired his reasoning powers. The statesman was proof against the splendor, the solemnity, and the romance which enchanted the poet. Any person who will contrast the sentiments expressed in his treatises on Prelacy, with the exquisite lines on ecclesiastical architecture and music in the *Penseroso*, which was published about the same time, will understand our meaning. This is an inconsistency which, more than any-
 10 thing else, raises his character in our estimation ; because it shows how many private tastes and feelings he sacrificed, in order to do what he considered his duty to mankind. It is the very struggle of the noble Othello. His heart relents ; but his hand is firm. He does nought in hate, but all in honor.
 15 He kisses the beautiful deceiver before he destroys her.

That from which the public character of Milton derives its great and peculiar splendor still remains to be mentioned. If he exerted himself to overthrow a forsworn king and a persecuting hierarchy, he exerted himself in conjunction with others.
 20 But the glory of the battle which he fought for that species of freedom which is the most valuable, and which was then the least understood—the freedom of the human mind—is all his

ions into swine, but the hero himself, having obtained from Mercury the herb Moly ("the antidote against its bewitching sweetness"), went boldly to her palace and remained uninjured by her cup.

7. The exquisite lines are :

" But let my due feet never fail
 To walk the studious cloister's pale,
 And love the high-embow'd roof,
 With antique pillars massy proof,
 And storied windows richly dight,
 Casting a dim religious light.
 There let the pealing organ blow,
 To the full-voic'd choir below,
 In service high and anthems clear,
 As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
 Dissolve me into ecstasies,
 And bring all heaven before mine eyes."

13. **Othello.** The hero of Shakespeare's play of that name. Iago works upon his jealousy till he believes his wife Desdemona false to him. Thereafter, much as he loves her, he thinks his honor demands it, and he murders her.

own. Thousands and tens of thousands among his contemporaries raised their voices against ship-money and the Star-chamber. But there were few indeed who discerned the more fearful evils of moral and intellectual slavery, and the benefits which would result from the liberty of the press, and the unfettered exercise of private judgment. These were the objects which Milton justly conceived to be the most important. He was desirous that the people should think for themselves as well as tax themselves, and be emancipated from the dominion of prejudice as well as from that of Charles. He knew that those who, with the best intentions, overlooked these schemes of reform, and contented themselves with pulling down the king and imprisoning the malignant, acted like the heedless brothers in his own poem, who, in their cagerness to disperse the train of the sorcerer, neglected the means of liberating the captive. They thought only of conquering when they should have thought of disenchanting.

“Oh, ye mistook ! Ye should have snatched the wand !

Without the rod reversed,

And backward mutters of dissevering power,

We cannot free the lady that sits here

Bound in strong fetters fixed and motionless.”

20

—*Comus*, 815-819.

To reverse the rod, to spell the charm backward, to break the ties which bound a stupefied people to the seat of enchantment, was the noble aim of Milton. To this all his public conduct was directed. For this he joined the Presbyterians—for this he forsook them. He fought their perilous battle; but he turned away with disdain from their insolent triumph. He saw that they, like those whom they had vanquished, were hostile to the liberty of thought. He therefore joined the Independents, and called upon Cromwell to break the secular chain, and to save free conscience from the paw of the Pres-

byterian wolf. With a view to the same great object, he attacked the licensing system, in that sublime treatise which every statesman should wear as a sign upon his hand, and as frontlets between his eyes. His attacks were, in general, directed less against particular abuses, than against those deeply seated errors on which almost all abuses are founded, the servile worship of eminent men, and the irrational dread of innovation.

That he might shake the foundations of these debasing sentiments more effectually, he always selected for himself the boldest literary services. He never came up in the rear when the outworks had been carried, and the breach entered. He pressed into the forlorn-hope. At the beginning of the changes, he wrote with incomparable energy and eloquence against the bishops. But, when his opinion seemed likely to prevail, he passed on to other subjects, and abandoned prelacy to the crowd of writers who now hastened to insult a falling party. There is no more hazardous enterprise than that of bearing the torch of truth into those dark and infected recesses in which no light has ever shone. But it was the choice and the pleasure of Milton to penetrate the noisome vapors, and to brave the terrible explosion. Those who most disapprove of his opinions must respect the hardihood with which he maintained them. He, in general, left to others the credit of expounding and defending the popular parts of his religious and political creed. He took his own stand upon those which the great body of his countrymen reprobated as criminal, or derided as paradoxical. He stood up for divorce and regicide. He ridiculed the *Eikon*. He attacked the prevailing systems

1. Presbyterian Wolf.

"Help us to save free conscience from the paw
Of hireling wolves whose gospel is their maw."

—Milton's *Sonnet to Cromwell*.

2. Licensing system. Milton wrote his *Areopagitica* in favor of the liberty of the press. (See p. 79, as well as *Memoir of Milton*, p. 11)

29. *Eikon* (*Eikon Basilike*—Portraiture of the King). A book attributed to Charles I., and giving an account of his Majesty's sufferings. In answer to this book, Milton wrote his *Iconoclast*, or "Image-breaker." See p. 79.

of education. His radiant and beneficent career resembled that of the god of light and fertility :

Nitor in adversum : nec me, qui cætera, vincit
Impetus, et rapido contrarius evehor orbi.

It is to be regretted that the prose writings of Milton should, in our time, be so little read. As compositions, they deserve the attention of every man who wishes to become acquainted with the full power of the English language. They abound with passages, compared with which the finest declamations of Burke sink into insignificance. They are a perfect field of cloth of gold. The style is stiff with gorgeous embroidery. Not even in the earlier books of the *Paradise Lost* has he ever risen higher than in those parts of his controversial works in which his feelings, excited by conflict, find a vent in bursts of devotional and lyric rapture. It is, to borrow his own majestic language, "a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies." (*The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelatcy*, Book II.)

We had intended to look more closely at these performances, to analyze the peculiarities of the diction, to dwell at some length on the sublime wisdom of the *Areopagitica*, and the nervous rhetoric of the *Iconoclast*, and to point out some of those magnificent passages which occur in the *Treatise of Reformation*, and the *Animadversions on the Remonstrant*. But the length to which our remarks have already extended renders this impossible.

We must conclude. And yet we can scarcely tear ourselves away from the subject. The days immediately following the publication of this relic of Milton appear to be peculiarly set

2. **God of light.** Phæbus in his address to Phaeton when the latter desired to drive the chariot of the Sun. "I have to contend against opposing circumstances; the force which overcomes all other things does not overcome me, and I am borne in a contrary direction to the swiftly moving world." (Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, II., 72, 73.)

10. **Burke, Edmund** (1729-1797). Famous as orator and political writer. 17-24. Three of Milton's five anti-episcopal pamphlets written in 1641, urging a root-and-branch abolition of Episcopacy.

apart and consecrated to his memory. And we shall scarcely be censured if, on this his festival, we be found lingering near his shrine, how worthless soever may be the offering which we bring to it. While this book lies on our table, we seem to be
 5 contemporaries of the great poet. We are transported a hundred and fifty years back. We can almost fancy that we are visiting him in his small lodging; that we see him sitting at the old organ beneath the faded green hangings; that we can catch the quick twinkle of his eyes, rolling in vain to find the
 10 day; that we are reading in the lines of his noble countenance the proud and mournful history of his glory and his affliction! We image to ourselves the breathless silence in which we should listen to his slightest word; the passionate veneration with which we should kneel to kiss his hand and weep upon
 15 it; the earnestness with which we should endeavor to console him, if indeed such a spirit could need consolation, for the neglect of an age unworthy of his talents and his virtues; the eagerness with which we should contest with his daughters, or with his Quaker friend Ellwood, the privilege of reading
 20 Homer to him, or of taking down the immortal accents which flowed from his lips.

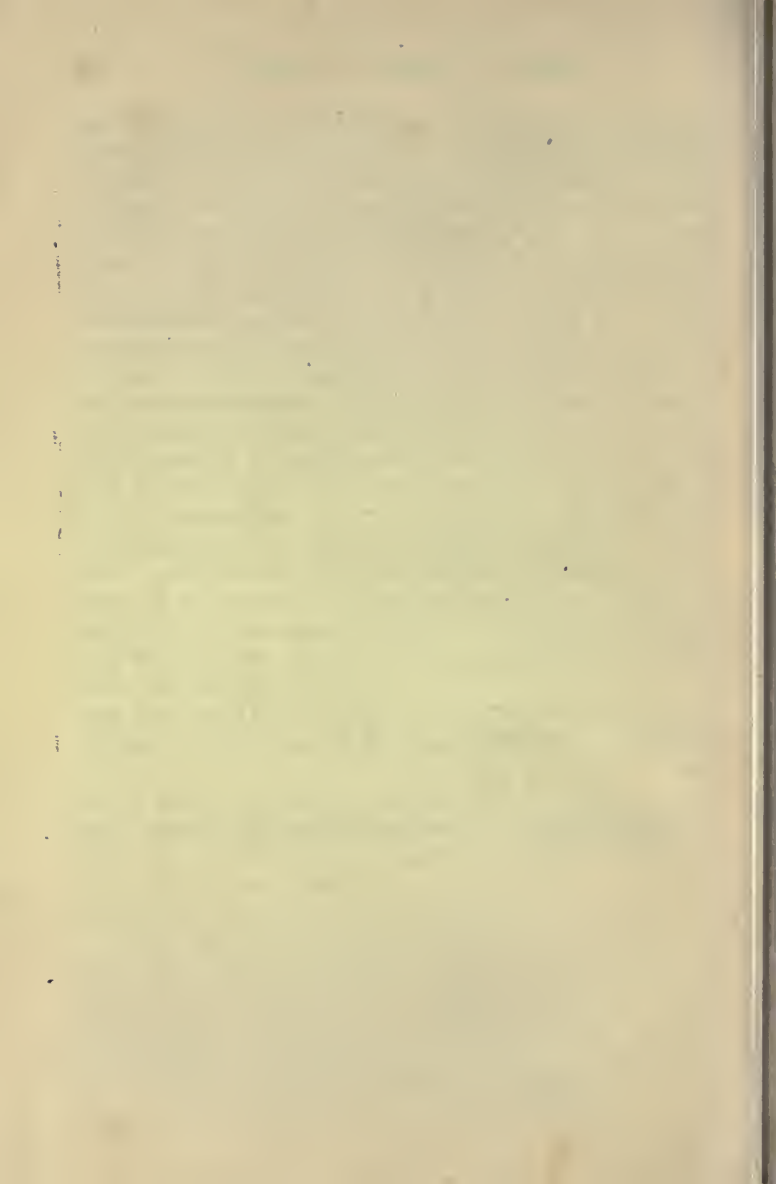
These are perhaps foolish feelings. Yet we cannot be ashamed of them; nor shall we be sorry if what we have written shall in any degree excite them in other minds. We
 25 are not much in the habit of idolizing either the living or the dead. And we think that there is no more certain indication of a weak and ill-regulated intellect than that propensity which, for want of a better name, we will venture to christen *Boswellism*. But *there are* a few characters which have stood

19. Ellwood, Thomas. A Quaker who obtained the liberty of coming to Milton's house, "when I would read to him what books he should appoint me, which was all the favor I desired." It was to Ellwood that Milton in 1665 showed the manuscript of *Paradise Lost*, and bade him take it home with him and read it at his leisure. On returning it, the Quaker made his famous speech, "Thou hast said much here of 'Paradise Lost,' but what hast thou to say of *Paradise found*?" Milton afterwards told Ellwood that to this casual question was due his writing *Paradise Regained*.

29. *Boswellism*. From James Boswell, the author of the *Life of Samuel Johnson*. Boswell worshiped his hero to the verge of weakness.

the closest scrutiny and the severest tests, which have been tried in the furnace and have proved pure, which have been weighed in the balance and have not been found wanting, which have been declared sterling by the general consent of mankind, and which are visibly stamped with the image and superscription of the Most High. These great men we trust that we know how to prize ; and of these was Milton. The sight of his books, the sound of his name, are refreshing to us. His thoughts resemble those celestial fruits and flowers which the Virgin Martyr of Massinger sent down from the gardens of Paradise to the earth, distinguished from the productions of other soils, not only by their superior bloom and sweetness, but by their miraculous efficacy to invigorate and to heal. They are powerful, not only to delight, but to elevate and purify. Nor do we envy the man who can study either the life or the writings of the great poet and patriot, without aspiring to emulate, not indeed the sublime works with which his genius has enriched our literature, but the zeal with which he labored for the public good, the fortitude with which he endured every private calamity, the lofty disdain with which he looked down on temptation and dangers the deadly hatred which he bore to bigots and tyrants, and the faith which he so sternly kept with his country and with his fame.

10. *Virgin Martyr*. A play of Philip Massinger (1554-1640), one of the Elizabethan dramatists.



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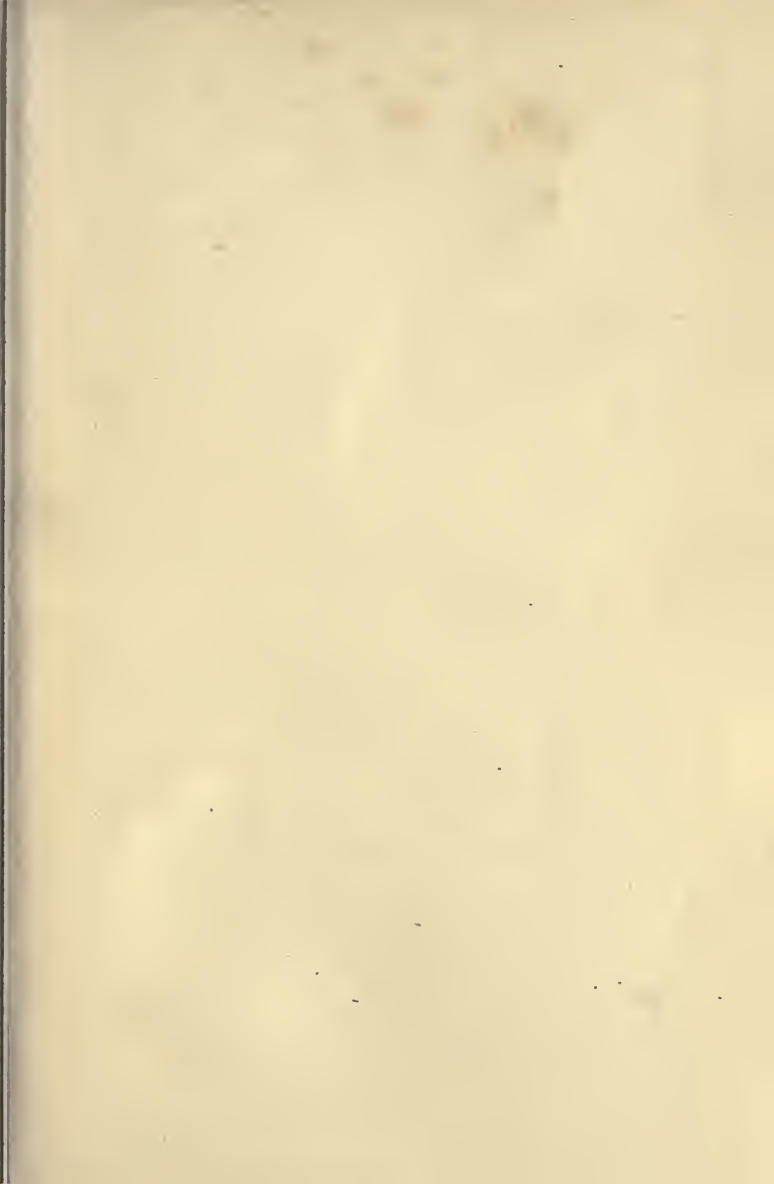
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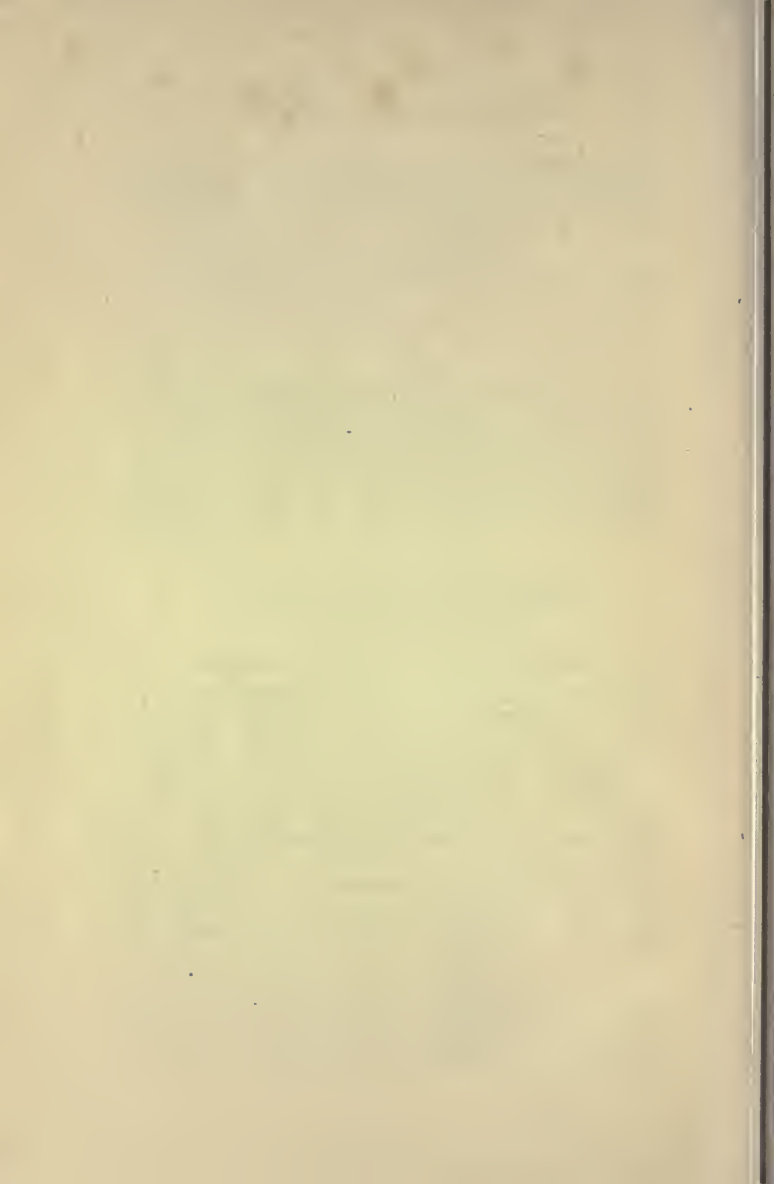
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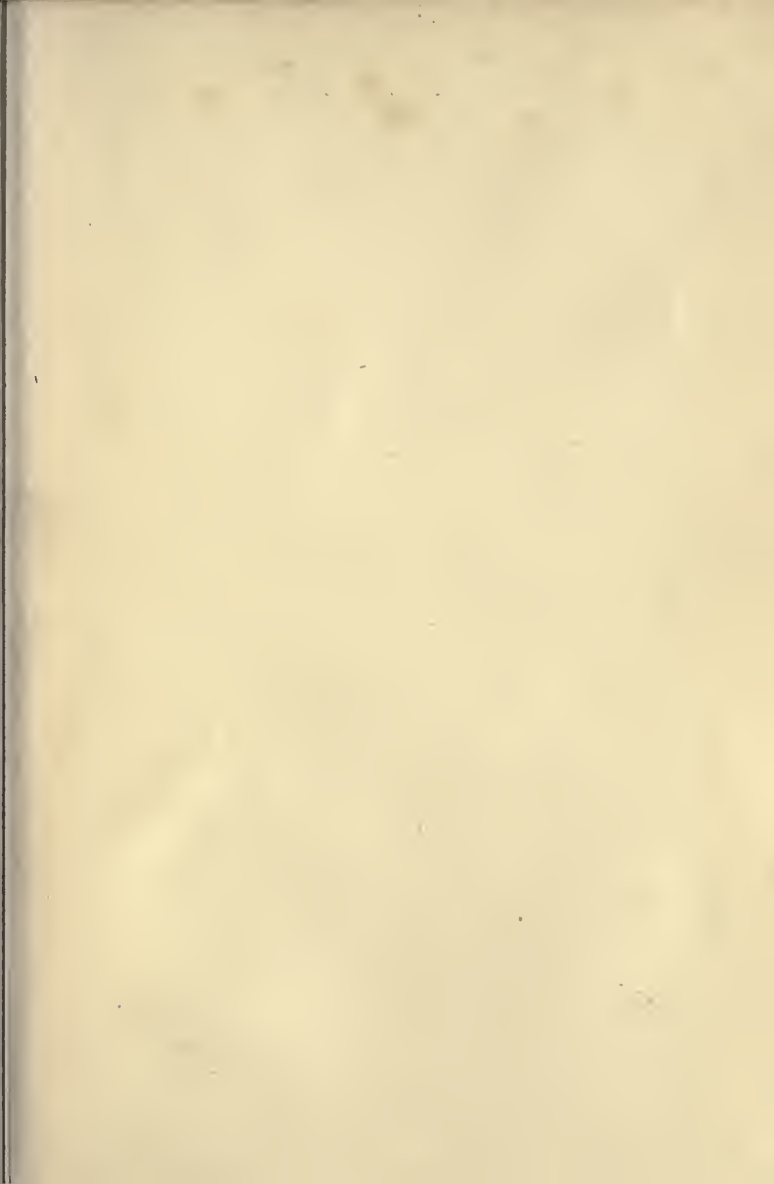
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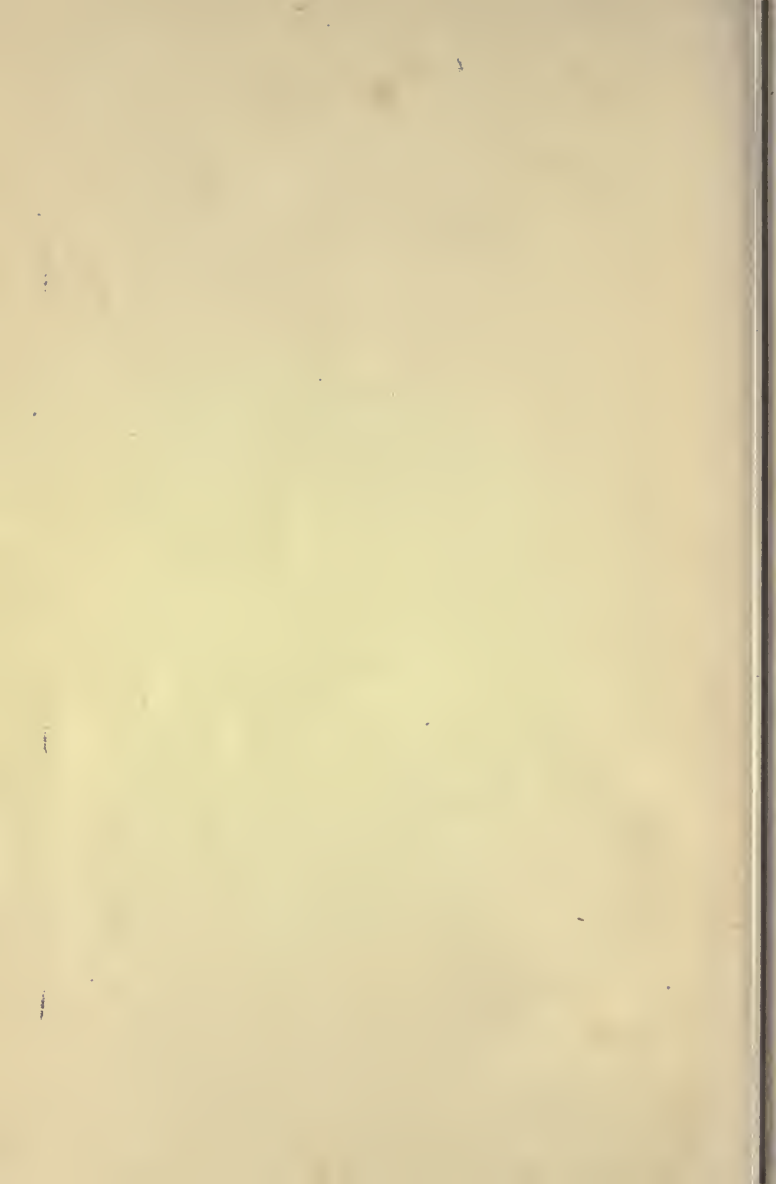
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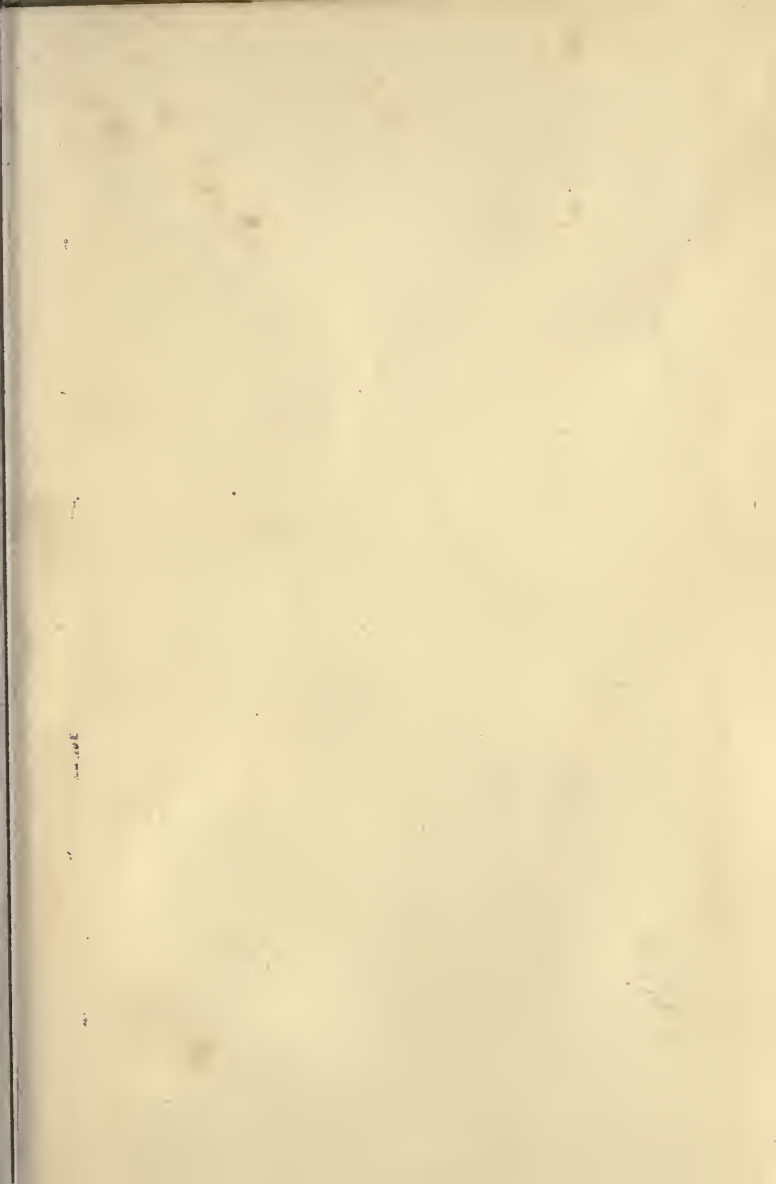
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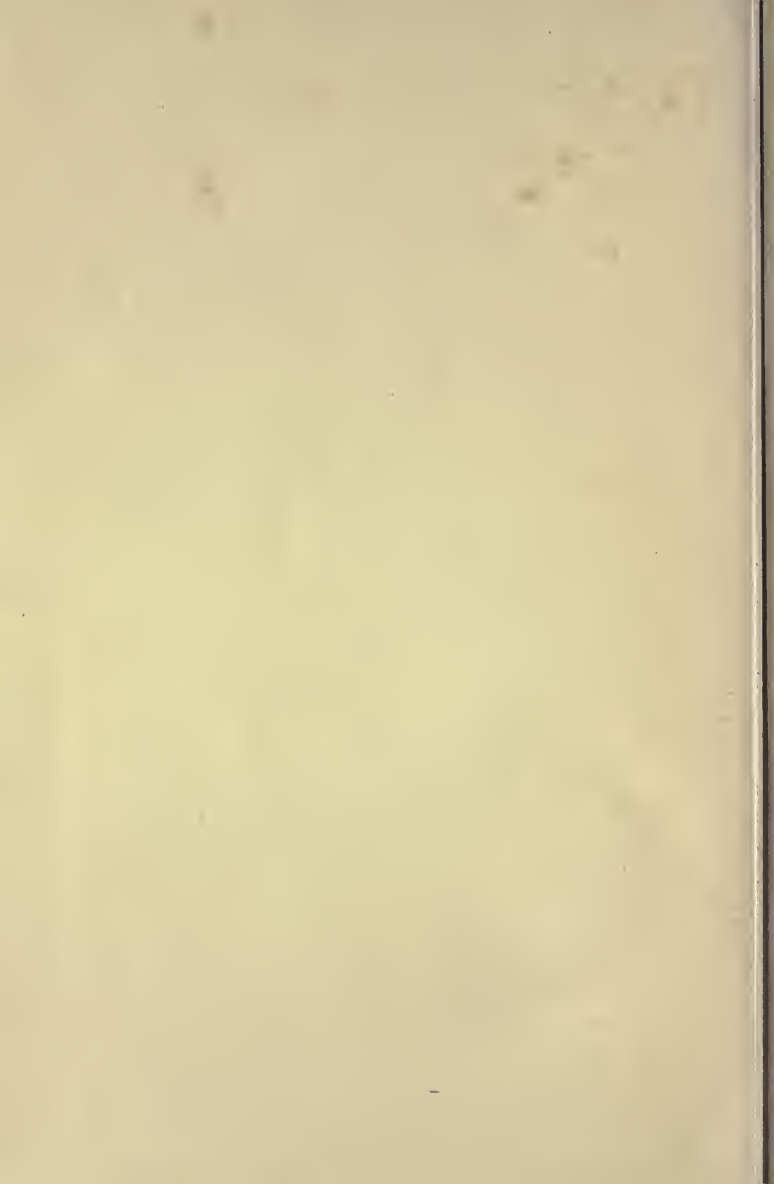


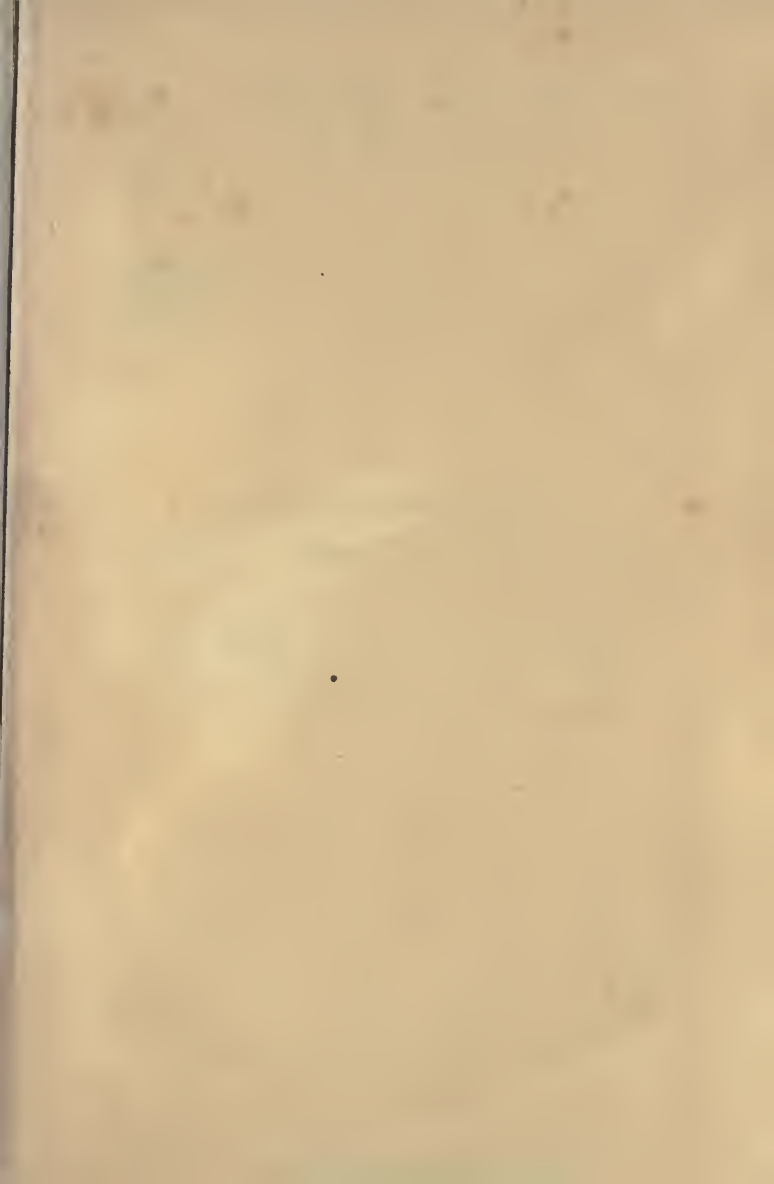


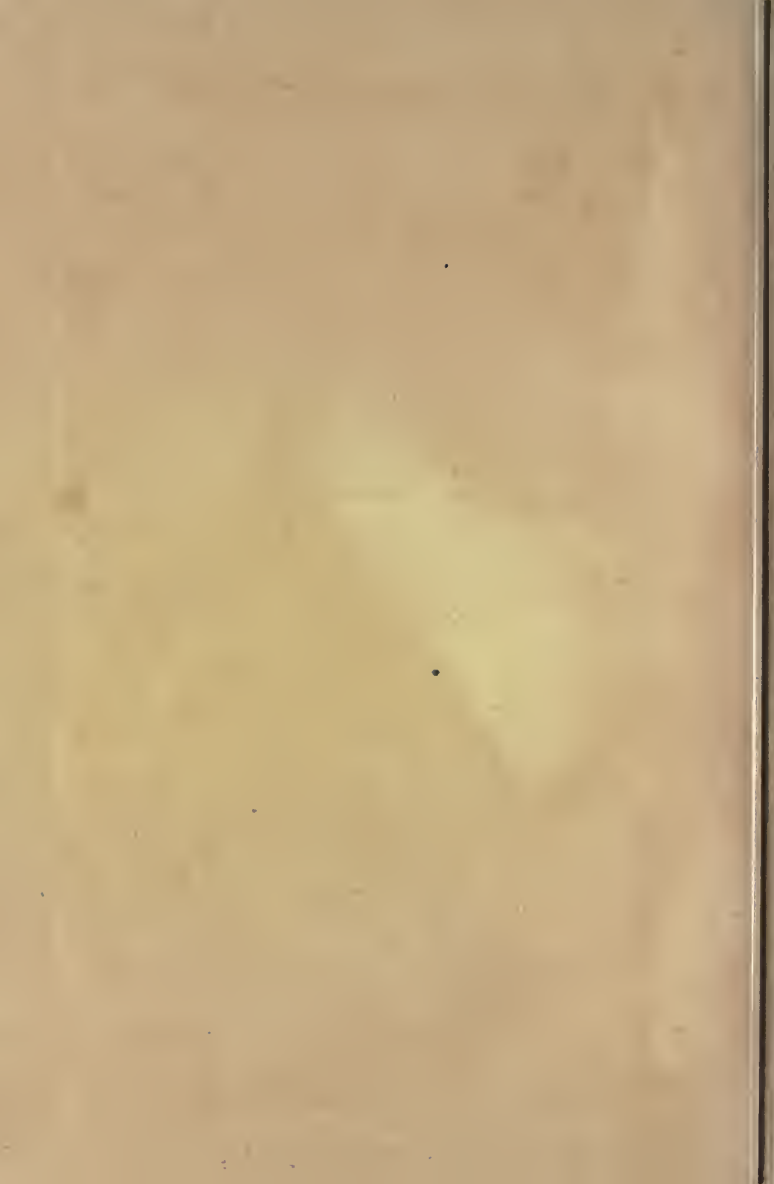












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